

Tests

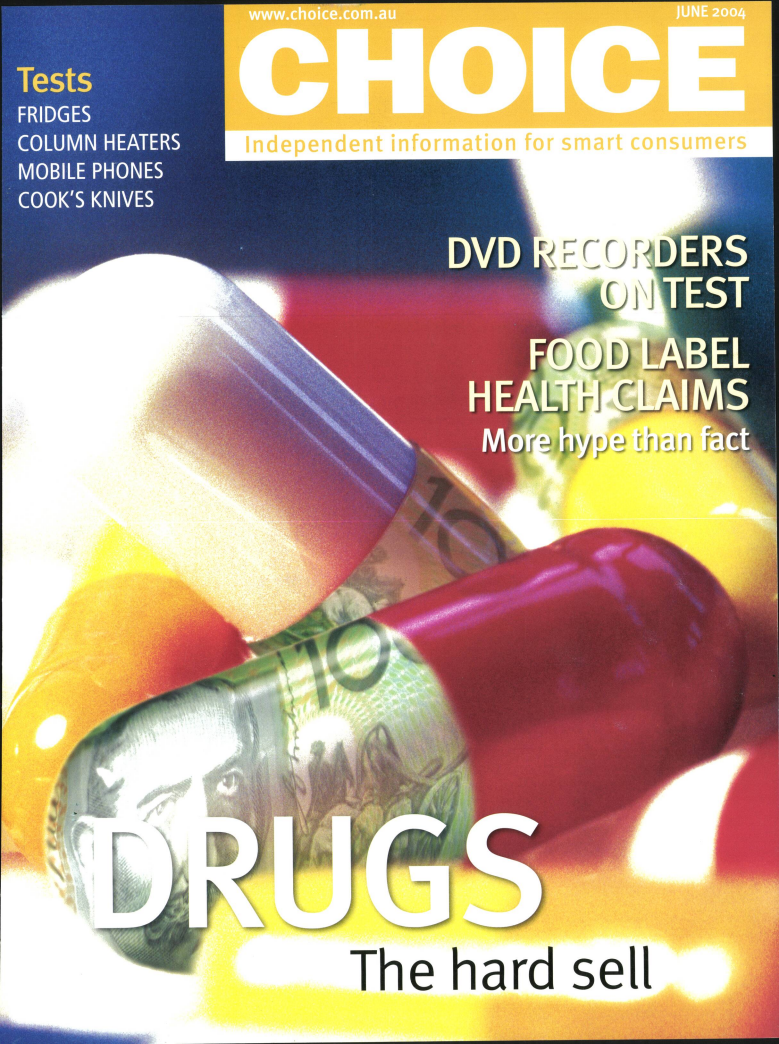
FRIDGES
COLUMN HEATERS
MOBILE PHONES
COOK'S KNIVES

CHOICE

Independent information for smart consumers

DVD RECORDERS
ON TEST

FOOD LABEL
HEALTH CLAIMS
More hype than fact



DRUGS

The hard sell

COMING SOON IN CHOICE

ESPRESSO MACHINES
BABY FOOD
OLIVES
ELECTRIC WALL OVENS
GYM SURVEY



this month online

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Unreliable claims

For many reasons that are generally regarded as good, pharmaceutical companies aren't allowed to advertise

prescription medicines directly to consumers. Yet they contrive to do it, and even their own industry body admits it and fines them — albeit a pittance compared with drug profits — for doing it (see the article starting on page 8).

Likewise, for a number of good reasons food manufacturers aren't allowed to make health claims on food labels — they can't refer to any disease or health condition. But CHOICE found plenty of labels that seem to make exactly that sort of claim in just one trip to the supermarket (see page 21).

The arrogance this kind of rule-flouting reveals is pretty breathtaking. Companies that indulge in it seem to think their marketing agendas give them the right to ignore laws and regulations made with the consumer's protection and wellbeing in mind. It could easily leave you thinking that even some companies that make food and medicines only really care about the people who buy them in terms of the income those people represent.

The best we can advise in consumer self-defence is to take no notice of product claims and advertisements, given the regularity with which they can be shown to be simplistic, make unproven claims, present a biased view and even, in some cases, appear to break laws. We'd suggest you start to look at claims and promotions with the same cynicism that many commercial players seem to show towards consumers.

Jane Mackenzie
Editor



Call 1300 360 655
and let us shop for you

All you need is the model name and number you want to buy, the price you want to beat, and your CHOICE subscriber number (from the mailing label with the magazine). CHOICE Shopper is available to personal subscribers only.

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How drug companies get around the law that says they can't advertise prescription medicines directly to consumers.

Photo: Austral/Jacqui Fry



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CORRECTION

DISHWASHERS CHOICE, April 2004

In the table on page 47 we listed the ASKO, FISHER & PAYKEL and WESTINGHOUSE dishwashers as not having an anti-flood device. In fact they do have this feature.

CAR RENTAL: WIN FOR CONSUMERS

CHOICE *Money & Rights* highlighted in its first issue (April 2004) that **AVIS** excluded insurance cover for single-car accidents and **EUROPCAR** excluded cover while the car is reversing. Both companies have informed us they're removing these exclusions from their rental agreements.

AVIS was unable to give us an exact timeline for the contract changes, so we check the rental agreement to see if the exclusions have been removed before you rent. **EUROPCAR** has removed the clause in principle and says it will change its terms and conditions by July 1.

The April issue of *CHOICE Money & Rights* contained an in-depth article on rental car traps. See page 24 or the flysheet that came with this magazine if you'd like to subscribe, or call 1800 069 552.

Can you help?

DIY SUPER

Do you run your own super fund or are you thinking about setting one up? If so, we'd like to hear from you.

- What do you see as the advantages of DIY super?
- Did your financial planner or accountant suggest it, and if so, why?
- How much money do you think you need to make DIY super worthwhile?

If you've already set up your own fund, please tell us:

How involved was your accountant/financial planner in the establishment of the fund and choice of investments?

How do you choose and manage

Full body scan: should you have one?

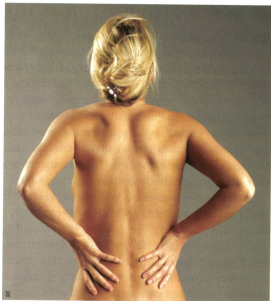
If you tend to worry about your future health — about all the serious diseases that could strike when it's too late to treat them effectively — the ads for full body scans will probably have caught your attention.

They've been widely promoted in past months, sometimes with the help of celebrities, for the potential early detection of serious diseases including lung cancer, emphysema, heart disease, tumours and various other problems.

A full body scan is a CT (computed tomography) scan, where xrays are taken from hundreds of angles and the information is analysed by a computer. Such a scan is generally a useful diagnostic tool for investigating certain suspected problem areas, or where there's a high probability of illness. However, as a screening tool for healthy people with no symptoms, full body scans have come under heavy criticism from experts in the area.

According to the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Radiologists, there's no evidence to date that these scans are either cost-effective or effective at prolonging life.

"There are significant chances that a minor abnormality will be misdiagnosed or that a real problem will be missed," said college president Dr Paul Sprague. "That's not the fault of the operator. It's simply a function of doing a huge



scan on a normal, healthy individual in whom you as a radiologist have no hint of what to look for."

Considering that in healthy people about 80% of abnormalities detected are relatively harmless, patients whose scans show suspicious findings may be subjected to expensive, invasive and perhaps unnecessary follow-up procedures. And if they receive a clean bill of health from their scan, they might gain a false sense of security and forgo important medical check-ups — a full body scan is no substitute for a mammogram, Pap smear, colonoscopy or blood test.

A further problem with these scans is the radiation level. It's "as safe as people having xrays of their spine or women having mammograms" says one ad promoting the service. What it fails to mention is that the radiation dose patients are exposed to is 100 to 600 times higher than from a chest xray. And that exposure to very high levels of radiation can in fact increase the possibility of cancer. Calculated roughly, a full body scan every three years from the ages of 40 to 70 will create odds of fatal cancer of 1 in 200.

Because of all these problems, the Environment Protection Authority NSW advises that only people over 50 who give their informed consent in writing should have a full body scan, and only if it's part of a comprehensive evaluation and with a written request from an independent medical practitioner.



Nappy cost comparison

As the mother of a baby and a young toddler, I read with interest your article on nappies (CHOICE, April 2004).

I noted that your article included the cost of Napisan for soaking cloth nappies plus the cost of a subsequent machine wash with detergent when comparing the cost of disposable nappies versus cloth nappies.

I have used Napisan as well as other generic nappy soakers and

would like to draw your attention to the fact that these products don't suggest that a subsequent machine wash is necessary.

I simply follow the manufacturer's instructions — soak nappies overnight for at least 12 hours, then rinse and spin in the machine. I've also found that using a little fabric softener leaves them lovely and soft. I then line-dry them.

My thoughts were that the above method (as recommended

by the manufacturers of these nappy-soaking products) would obviously bring down both the financial and environmental costs of using cloth nappies even further than you reported in your test.

Gail Richards
Via internet

In formulating our wash scenarios for comparing cloth and disposable nappy costs, we drew on the experience of several mothers, who told us they preferred to follow soaking with a detergent wash. However, if you try a nappy soaker by itself and think the results are satisfactory, it'll certainly cut the costs of using cloth nappies.

Credit file information bungle

Regarding your article in the Jan/Feb 2004 issue, I'm only 20 and have already had difficulty with my credit file report.

When I asked for a copy of it, I noticed that it had my previous address as being in NSW. Our family has only ever lived in Victoria and SA. It also had my birth date incorrect.

THUMBS UP!



■ Bill Moroney, via internet, awards a thumbs-up to **BOILING BILLY PUBLICATIONS**. When an inner-city Perth newsagent refused to replace a camping book that fell apart the first time it was opened, Bill contacted the publisher to let it know about possible binding faults in that edition. **BOILING BILLY PUBLICATIONS** apologised and sent Bill a replacement camping book, adding a free cookbook.

■ Michelle Bisbal, via internet, awards a thumbs-up to **PHILIPS** for replacing an out-of-warranty DVD player that had a disk-reading fault with a new player with more features.

When I applied for a loan, I was accused of trying to start a new credit report because my date of birth was different.

I went through the proper process of changing these incorrect details but **BAYCORP** was very unhelpful about the situation and to this day I'm not sure if it's been changed.

J (H name supplied)
Via internet

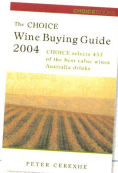
***BAYCORP** told us this type of problem is usually dealt with immediately by call centre staff and that it also has a team dedicated to resolving outstanding issues. It undertook to look into JH's situation and resolve his credit file problem. For more on problems others have had with their credit files, see CHOICE, Jan/Feb 2004.*

LETTER OF THE MONTH

We want to hear from you — your experiences help our research and often let other readers know about scams and rip-offs. Positive outcomes you've had to a complaint you took to a manufacturer, retailer, importer or tradesperson interest us, too. Address these letters to *Thumbs Up* at the address on page 50.

To thank you for writing to us, *Your Letters* awards a prize of a CHOICE book to the 'Letter of the month'. This month's winner, JH, receives *The CHOICE Wine Buying Guide 2004*, or any other book of his choice from Consumer Bookshelf, pages 18–20.

We're sorry we don't have the resources to answer all your letters personally, and in the magazine we may edit them or print only an extract. See page 50 for how to reach us.



■ **Over-medicalising normal conditions** — also called ‘disease mongering’. Critics of DTCA — in its branded or unbranded form — are particularly concerned about the increasing trend to over-medicalise normal physiological events: as one health professional succinctly stated, “Older men going bald or getting a bit droopy — these things are quite normal, but they’re turned into diseases by drug companies.”

While information promoted in unbranded DTCA may contain a variety of treatment options, they tend to be weighted in favour of drug treatments, promoting the ‘pill for every ill’ mentality. The trouble then is that people expect medication will solve all the problems, whereas there may well be a raft of other, more complex underlying issues that aren’t addressed (for instance, erectile dysfunction may be due to relationship problems, stress, other health issues or alcohol).

■ **Drug companies don’t necessarily provide balanced information.** Like all advertising, the aim of medical advertising is to subtly — or not so subtly — convince you to like, want and buy the product.

A study of 109 ads in 10 leading medical journals (pharmas are allowed to advertise to health professionals) found that 40% had an unfair balance between negative effects and benefits, and concluded that 44% would lead to improper treatment if they were relied upon. Hopefully, because they’re in medical journals rather than the popular press, doctors can use their professional judgment to see through the smokescreen.

Similar ads in the lay media have greater potential to mislead. Our sister organisation in New Zealand had three lay media ads assessed by health experts, and none was judged as presenting a balanced picture. It concluded that product ads

DRUG PLUGS

The drug companies haven’t let a ban on DTCA stop them coming up with ways of getting their products in the public eye. Here are some recent examples:

■ News stories in early February this year featured a new medication to hit the market: **Concerta** Extended-Release tablets. Used for treating kids with attention deficit disorders, it’s the same drug marketed as Ritalin (methylphenidate), so it’s not a new drug, but is made by a different company. The hook was that because of its extended-release action, only one tablet was required instead of taking them several times a day.

However, Ritalin has its own extended-release medication (Ritalin LA — long-acting methylphenidate) which has been on the market since January 2003. There are subtle (to the lay audience) differences between them, but the main difference is that Concerta lasts 12 hours, and Ritalin-LA only eight hours. Whether the launch of Concerta could be considered newsworthy to the general public is debatable.

■ The ABC’s *Media Watch* program reported on the **Healthy Weight Task Force** (HWTf), which was marketed as being a network of supposedly independent primary healthcare professionals (doctors, dietitians and pharmacists) formed in response to rising levels of excess weight and obesity in Australia.

The group apparently reviewed various methods of losing weight, and gave the big tick to the drug **Xenical**. This was duly reported with varying degrees of sensationalism and embellishment on various news and current affairs programs. What wasn’t made clear, however, was that the HWTf was funded by Roche — the maker of Xenical — which wasn’t disclosed on the HWTf media material or its website.

By promoting the medication in mainstream media, they were arguably attempting to increase or create a demand for their product. Roche was fined \$50,000 (reduced from \$75,000 on appeal) for breaching Medicines Australia’s code of conduct (see *Who’s keeping things in check*, page 12, for more on Medicines Australia and its code of conduct).

It’s all academic now, as Xenical is available over-the-counter, and free from restrictions that apply to marketing of prescription medicines.

■ Campaigners for Novo Nordisk, the maker of **Vagifem**, distributed capes printed with a website address to hairdressing salons. It was printed in reverse so clients — a captive audience — could read it in the mirror. Hairdressers were given scripted messages to use and factsheet handouts. The website was ostensibly educational material about atrophic vaginitis (a condition that causes painful intercourse, among other things) but also referred to an (unnamed) treatment described as “low dose, no mess, no fuss topical oestrogen therapy” and contained reference to active ingredient “17 beta oestradiol”.

The Medicines Australia Code of Conduct Committee deemed this was enough information for consumers to ask doctors for a specific prescription medicine (the doctor would know which one it was), and fined the company \$20,000. The ad company responsible for the campaign won the prize for ‘Best one-off media idea’ in the national Media Federation awards.

■ An ‘educational feature’ (advertising) in a Qantas in-flight magazine about sleep mentioned **Stilnox**, a sleeping tablet made by Sanofi-Synthelabo — which also sponsored the ‘story’. The company was fined \$50,000 and told not to use that kind of ad in the lay media. By the time it was reported, however, it may already have been seen by thousands of travellers.

■ The ABC’s *Media Watch* reported that a community service announcement (shown on the ABC) from the Arthritis Foundation suggested that people “ask [their] doctor about the exciting new arthritis treatments”. The foundation, flush with funds after a generous \$250,000 donation from pharmas Searle and Pfizer, also gave people its phone number so they could ask about treatments and get a free book.

Media Watch was somewhat surprised when they rang the number and were told about a “whizz-bang drug called **Celebrex**, which has just come out on the market”. Celebrex comes courtesy of Pfizer and Searle.

Home

- About erection problems
- How does an erection happen?
- Talking to your doctor
- Treatment options
- Self Test
- Get your Performance Pack
- Preserve erection
- Support Groups

SEE YOUR DOCTOR.

For more information ask for a

Click here to find out more

Welcome to rolintherapy.com.au, the website which offers you advice and information on understanding and managing erection problems, otherwise known as erectile dysfunction (ED).

Erection problems are more common than most people think affecting about 1 in 4 Australian men

Based on a survey of men attending GP clinics

Erection problems are not the agreed thing to discuss, whether it be asking your doctor for help or trying to talk it through with a loved one. Visiting this site will help you understand the facts about erection. It may be the problem, dispel common myths about the condition and it may be the first step to addressing the issue and doing something positive about it.

Having a healthy sex life is important to our general feeling of happiness and well-being. In fact, in a recent survey, 89% of Australian men believe an active sex life is important for their sense of well-being

"Nutsation Study of Health and Relationships, based on a survey of 11 men and women aged 18-59

We hope this site provides you with useful information and advice on managing erection problems. Learn that it is a treatable condition and to provide sufferers and their partners on what action can be taken to restore a healthy sex life.

Healthcare Professionals Site

Click here if you are a G.P. wanting to access pharmaceutical information

Patient Site

Click here to find out more about erection problems and how to get help

HOME

- What is the HWTF?
- Weight Loss Management
- BMI Calculator
- Eating Right
- Realistic Weight Loss Goals
- Healthy Living
- Treatment Options
- Facts or Fiction
- FAQs
- Have Your Say
- References
- Disclaimer

The Healthy Weight Task Force welcomes you...

The Healthy Weight Task Force (HWTF) aims to raise awareness of excess weight as a serious health issue and provide information and tools to successfully address and manage excess weight and obesity.

This HWTF site provides helpful and sensible tips for those wanting to lose weight and will help give guidance on the best method to lose weight and sustain it long term.

What is the HWTF?

Meet the members and understand the role of the HWTF

Weight Loss Management

Find out your Body Mass Index and learn how to set realistic weight loss goals and maintain long term weight loss

Treatment Options

What is available to complement a healthy diet and exercise, and help you to achieve weight loss goals?

WEIGHT LOSS OPTION EVALUATION TOOL

There are treatments available which in combination with diet and exercise can help you start and sustain weight loss long term. See Treatment Options

Almost 60% of adult Australians are overweight and of these 19% are obese

A television news story about Travatan, under the headline "cure for blindness", suggested it was a unique treatment for glaucoma or blindness. The story also pointed out that it was freely available from ophthalmologists, and featured interviews with experts.

The Medicines Australia Code of Conduct Committee felt it should have been discussed in the context of other treatments for glaucoma, thus avoiding the implication that it was unique or had unique qualities. The committee determined it constituted a promotion of prescription medicine to the public, and was concerned that the experts interviewed were being paid by Travatan's maker, Alcon Laboratories. Alcon was fined \$45,000, reduced to \$7500 on appeal.

Social phobia (fear of social situations) is an anxiety disorder with government figures suggesting an estimated 370,000 sufferers in Australia in 1997, when Roche started promoting its antidepressant **Aurorix** (moclobemide) for its treatment.

Roche (through its PR firm) issued a press release announcing more than one million Australians suffered from social phobia. A clinical psychologist was quoted strongly endorsing the role of antidepressants in its treatment.

As an article in the *British Medical Journal* says, "All the media stories seemed to be part of an idea push to change the common perception of shyness from a personal difficulty to a psychiatric disorder." That's the crux of the objections to this type of campaign: the over-medicalisation of common and relatively minor problems.

The publicity juggernaut took on its own momentum, with a newspaper article called "Too shy for words" — reportedly not orchestrated by Roche — stating two million Australians suffered from social phobia.

Interestingly there was a similar social phobia awareness campaign in the US in 1999, this time orchestrated by SmithKline Beecham (now GlaxoSmithKline) and its PR company, promoting an antidepressant drug **Paxil** (paroxetine, marketed as **Aropax** in Australia) as a treatment.

Ads with the slogan "Imagine being allergic to people" appeared, with shyness and embarrassment turned into a life-crifping psychological illness. DTCA being allowed in the US, the drug could have been promoted directly to the public. However, the campaigners deliberately chose not to name the drug or the company, because that would have meant having to describe Paxil's unpleasant side effects.

Almost overnight social phobia became one of the most common mental illnesses in the US, affecting up to 13% of the population. US media mentions of social phobia increased from 50 in the years 1997 and 1998 to over a million in 1999. Paxil sales skyrocketed.

The *British Medical Journal* reports that around the time **Propecia** (finasteride, a drug that helps prevent and reverse hair loss in men) was approved for sale in Australia, a series of articles appeared in newspapers with new information, reportedly based on a study, about the emotional and social trauma caused by baldness. The study, discussed earnestly in the media by concerned experts, suggested losing hair could cause panic and impact on job prospects and mental wellbeing.

Ads on buses and in magazines urged men who were concerned about hair loss to see their doctors. What they didn't tell us was that the study, experts and other publicity were all funded by Merck (the drug's manufacturer) and its PR firm.

Finally, no discussion of thinly veiled DTCA would be complete without mentioning the current proliferation of **erectile dysfunction** print and TV campaigns, with Pelé, Gary Sweet and numerous anonymous players imploring we ask our doctors for help. Pfizer was chastised and fined \$10,000 by the Medicines Australia Code of Conduct Committee for an ad citing a study claiming, "One in three men have erection problems." What the ad didn't point out was that the study cited included men who only had problems 'occasionally', and that the average age of those with complete ED was 71. Erectile dysfunction ads are discussed further on page 13.



couldn't be relied on to provide impartial information: "That's just not what advertisements do."

An independent review was more damning: it concluded that DTCA doesn't provide consumers with objective information on risks, benefits and treatment options, and is a serious risk to the sustainability of health systems. There are now moves to ban DTCA of medicines in New Zealand.

And a US survey showed that drug ads tended to rely on emotional appeals rather than hard facts about the benefits.

Those reporting the story might not get it right. A study of media reporting of medical developments found that journalists tend not to mention possible side effects of treatments; tend not to mention how medical studies are funded (that is, whether it's by pharmas) or whether quoted experts are funded (and by whom); and tend to use pharma's press releases, which may selectively report research findings, rather than go to the original source (the study as published in a medical journal).

Dangers of self-medication. If people are determined to get hold of a particular drug and their doctor won't oblige, there's always the internet. At present there's no law preventing the importation of prescription medicines for personal use, and while reputable online pharmacies require a prescription from a doctor, not all online drug sites are so scrupulous.

THE ROLE OF DOCTORS

Proponents of DTCA argue that the decision about prescribing medication as appropriate ultimately comes down to the doctor, and that banning it suggests doctors are pawns with no say in the matter. While it's generally true that you need a doctor's approval — and prescription — to take a particular medication, a patient's wishes carry a good deal of clout.

DTCA may encourage people to discuss things with their doctor, which is a good thing. It can help destigmatise certain conditions and make people realise they're not alone. It can also provide awareness of and information about drugs that aren't on the PBS — like Xenical or Viagra, say.

A review of the effects of DTCA on random members of the public in the US found that around a quarter had spoken to their doctor about a drug or condition in response to advertising; 6–9% directly requested an advertised drug and almost all who requested them got them. Another survey found

Who's keeping things in check?

Marketing of medicines is regulated through a code of conduct administered by Medicines Australia, the pharmaceutical industry lobby body. Its aim is to "set the standards for the ethical marketing and promotion of pharmaceutical products in Australia", whether directed at medical professionals or the public.

When ads or other promotional activities are thought to breach the code, they're reported and the complaint looked into. Most of the complainants are other pharmas, but occasionally other interested parties (usually individual health professionals, the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) or consumer health organisations) come forward.

We've listed some recent cases reported to Medicines Australia in *Drug plugs*, page 10, and on the surface it appears it's doing its job — at least it's catching some of them. However, the process takes place behind closed doors and many cases aren't publicly reported. Furthermore, the fines imposed for breaching the code are small (the maximum is \$75,000) compared with the earnings potential of a drug (possibly more than \$100 million).

This leads us to question whether it's appropriate for the pharmaceutical industry to regulate itself in such important matters as marketing and company ethics.

that 28% of respondents would change doctors to get the drugs they wanted.

Not surprisingly, in surveys of doctors the overwhelming majority say DTCA has had a negative impact on the doctor-patient relationship, and that they were being pressured to prescribe drugs they wouldn't normally use. A study in New Zealand found 69% of responding GPs reported they had been under pressure from patients to prescribe advertised medicines.

But of course doctors wouldn't prescribe anything they thought was inappropriate or unnecessary, even if they were under pressure ... or would they? A study of 24 British GPs found that almost half said they'd prescribed medicines they knew were ineffective, simply because they were expected to.

The doctors acknowledged that the importance of the interpersonal aspects of the doctor-patient relationship — keeping on good terms — often overrode clinical judgement. It's only a small study, but Australian doctors we spoke to agreed that many doctors want to keep their patients happy.

Bear in mind also that for every unbranded ad campaign the public is exposed to, doctors are also being 'educated' about the products and getting promotions from drug company representatives. It's been estimated that the drug industry spends on average around \$1 billion per year in Australia — \$21,000 per doctor — on drug promotions. While many doctors claim they're immune to the effects of marketing, it's effective enough for the pharmas to justify the expenditure.

Getting back to Debbie's case, it's surprising she'd been prescribed Xenical — in clinical terms, according to her body mass index (BMI), she was only just overweight, and certainly not among the obese or nearly obese population for whom the drug is intended. Further questioning about her diet and lifestyle would have revealed she did little exercise ... and watched a lot of daytime TV. Addressing her behaviour would have been a preferable first step — and far more cost-effective for her.

WE NEED INFORMATION, NOT MARKETING

"The best consumer is an educated consumer ... Who better than the manufacturer to help this process?" — Pfizer spokesperson, cited in the British Medical Journal.

We recognise there's a need for consumers to have access to reliable information about drugs and treatment options. And while we'd agree with Pfizer that "the best consumer is an educated consumer", we don't agree that the manufacturer is the best source of unbiased information. ■

If only expectations are raised ...

The ABC's *Media Watch* took actor Gary Sweet to task for promoting Levitra in a media campaign earlier this year. Of course he didn't actually mention Levitra — at least he *usually* didn't — because he's not allowed to. It was publicly referred to as the "performance pack initiative". However, if you went to the campaign's rollinthehay.com.au website, sponsored by GlaxoSmithKline and Bayer, you'd find on its home page "Click here if you have been prescribed Levitra".

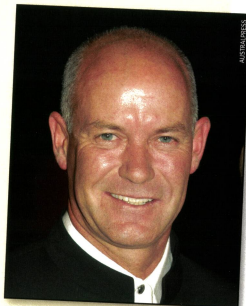
Denying that his promotional undertakings were anything but altruistic, Sweet told Ray Martin, "I'm concerned with all men's health issues." Headlines such as "Gary Sweet doesn't have erectile dysfunction" can at least knock off that suspicion, leading us to conclude, correctly as it turns out, that he was being paid to spruik.

Also on the [rollinthehay](http://rollinthehay.com.au) website are links to support organisations Impotence Australia and Andrology Australia. Andrology Australia, or The Australian Centre of Excellence in Male Reproductive Health, was recently established with funding from the Commonwealth Government, according to its website.

But Impotence Australia was originally established by Pfizer — the company behind Viagra — with a \$200,000 grant. Sponsors now also include GlaxoSmithKline and Bayer (makers and marketers of Levitra) and Eli Lilly (which makes Cialis). Granted, they provide all sorts of impotence and sexual health information, and mention non-pill forms of erectile dysfunction (ED) treatment. But it's hardly independent.

ED and problems with sexual performance are serious conditions in that they have major impacts on men's self-esteem and relationships. There are no doubt some men who could benefit from ED drugs, and who might be encouraged by the campaigns to speak to their doctors. Some of them are also likely to have medical problems identified or get referred on to services such as marriage guidance or lifestyle counselling.

But a study on Viagra recently published in the *British Medical Journal* found that the expectations raised by media hype about the drug meant that when it failed, men with ED problems were devastated. Many believed they'd never have sex again. As one of the men said, "There was a big hype in the press — 'This is the be-all and end-all, the wonder drug'.... And then when you try it and nothing happened — massive disappointment."





Recording TV programs

Confused whether to replace your old VCR with an HDR (or PVR), DVDR or DVD/HDR? Read on for enlightenment.

IN A NUTSHELL

■ On test: eight machines for recording TV programs — DVD recorders, a DVD player with a hard disk, and hard disk recorders.

■ All the machines in the test are technically good. So decide what you want the new addition to your entertainment deck to do, then look for a good price.

Gone are the days when buying a new video recorder was all you could do when yours had given up the ghost. Now tell your electronics retailer that you need a new video recorder and you'll probably hear all about the new breeds of recording machine — DVD recorders, DVD players with a hard disk and hard disk recorders. All will record your favourite TV programs, and all offer you a little bit extra too.

WHAT'S WHAT?

■ A **DVD recorder/player** has a built-in TV tuner that can receive analogue broadcasts, so it can record from TV as well as play DVDs. It functions like a video recorder, but you record onto recordable or rewritable DVDs. The disadvantage of this type of machine is that you need to buy and store blank DVDs. However, you can easily lend your recordings to friends if their machine supports the same DVD format (for more on this, see *What to look for*, far right).

■ A **hard disk (or drive) recorder** (HDR), also sometimes called a personal video recorder (PVR), is basically a digital TV set-top box with a hard disk for recording. You can use it with any TV, but it's

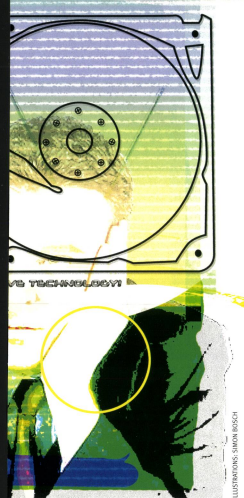
particularly useful if you want to receive and record digital TV but don't want to buy a new digital TV set.

We tested basic set-top boxes (without a recording function) for our article in *CHOICE*, April 2004. With the machines in this test you can also record from a TV (but not necessarily from other sources such as a video camera, VCR or DVD player) onto the hard drive. So you don't have to buy and store disks for everyday recording. If you want to keep a recording or share it with friends, though, you have to copy it onto video or DVD with a separate recorder, which you'd also need to play videos or DVDs.

■ With the **DVD player with a hard disk** (DVD/HDR) in this test (the **HYUNDAI HY-DVDR**) you can record from analogue TV onto its hard drive, but only play DVDs, not record on them. It isn't a DVD recorder, but it can copy a DVD to the hard drive.

TECHNICALLY GOOD AND EASY TO USE

To find out what the different types can do and how easy they are to use, we bought eight — four DVD players/recorders, three hard disk recorders and one DVD player with a hard disk recorder — from the lower end of the market. They're currently still pretty



expensive, but as is usual with new electronic gear, prices are likely to fall considerably over the next few years.

For the picture and sound quality tests we split the recorders into two groups: those with a digital TV tuner (all HDRs) and those with an analogue one (the rest). We assessed the picture quality of their recordings and, for the DVD players, also that of DVD movies, and the sound produced through the stereo outputs for DVD movies and CD music. We also checked how well they handle a faulty DVD.

All of them scored well — in fact pretty much the same within their groups — for picture and sound quality, so we didn't include these in our ratings; they're based only on ease of use and standby energy performance. The table, page 16, lists them all in rank order.

Continued on page 16

WHAT TO BUY

PIONEER DVR-310 (DVD)	\$999
TOPFIELD TF5000PVRT (HDR)	\$1099
OMNI DW2105 (DVD)	\$599
HYUNDAI HY-DVDR (DVD/HDR)	\$599

What to look for

ALL RECORDERS

- **Remote controls** should have buttons that are sized, shaped and spaced so you can easily find and press them individually. They should be grouped so you can easily go to specific functions, and the most commonly used buttons should be prominent. All should have clear English labels or obvious symbols.
- **Onscreen menus** should be large and easy to read, with a logical structure, so you don't have to resort to the manual to find settings and functions. It's an advantage to have some control over their opacity, so you don't miss anything if you need to change a setting while your favourite show is on.
- **Written instructions** should be detailed enough so you can easily set up and use the unit. Clear descriptions and pictures are often very useful, particularly if you're connecting it to a number of other devices.
- **Timeslip**, timeshift or chase play are all names applied to a useful function that frees you from waiting for a recording to finish before you watch it. In most cases, you just hit the pause button while you answer the phone or make a cuppa. The recording continues, but when you're ready you hit play and watch from the point at which you stopped. It also allows you to do your own instant replay. With timeslip on, if you missed that last brilliant tennis shot you just hit the back button and watch it, then fast forward to where you were and you don't miss a thing. And if you come home halfway through a show you're recording, you can watch it from the beginning while it records the end. All the hard disk models have timeslip, but the **PIONEER** is the only DVD recorder with it in this test.
- **The number of recording events/types** should fit your normal recording patterns. Check not only how many events you can set, but also what type — once only, daily, monthly or by date and time.

HARD DISK RECORDERS

- **Channel management** controls are important (particularly for HDRs with a digital tuner — see last month's article on digital set-top boxes for more on this), so you can group frequently watched channels or skip

channels easily. In the digital world there are many more channels than we're used to with analogue TV and not all are useful at present.

- **Sufficient storage** to support your normal recording habits. Keep a record for about a month before you buy to see how many hours you'll need each week and for how long you generally want to keep recordings, so you won't run out of space.
- **Connections** that allow you to copy to tape or DVD, should you decide to keep a program.
- **Aspect ratio control** lets you move easily between normal 4:3 and widescreen 16:9 formats. This is handy when broadcasts change format, which happens more than you might think in the current digital TV world. Ideally, you should be able to change it with the push of a button on the remote control.
- **Image quality controls** (contrast, brightness and colour) are necessary because digital broadcast is likely to be of better quality than your analogue reception. Consequently, your settings for analogue may make a digital broadcast look garish when you switch from one to the other.
- **Upgrades** to the hard drive and software should be possible. This will help ensure your hard disk recorder lasts longer and keeps up with changes in the digital world.

DVD RECORDERS

- The types of **DVD format** supported for copy and playback are important if you intend to play them on friends' DVD players. The most common formats are DVD-R, DVD-RW, DVD+R, DVD+RW. There's also a **PANASONIC**-format DVD RAM, but it's physically different from the others and not often supported by non-PANASONIC products. All models in this test record on DVD+R/RW except the **PIONEER**, which uses DVD-R/RW.
- **Compression levels** allow you to fit more on a DVD. All the products in this test can manage six hours at maximum compression, but there's a slight trade-off in picture and sound quality.

For more DVD features, see the article on DVD players in the December 2003 issue of CHOICE, or go to www.choiceextra.com.au and click on Dec 03 under 'DVD players' in the index.



Continued from page 15

WHICH ONE'S FOR YOU?

The four machines in the *What to buy* list include the best of each type we tested. Which one's the best one for you depends on what you want to use it for. The scenarios below should help you with your choice.

■ If you regularly rent or buy DVDs and want to record programs from your analogue TV onto DVD to watch later (or to keep), the **PIONEER DVR-310** scored best of the DVD recorders and is the easiest to use of all the machines tested. What makes it stand out from other recorders is that it has 'timeslip' (also called 'timeshift' or 'chase play') when you use special high-speed disks. This new, popular feature allows you to attend to phone calls and other interruptions during your favourite show without missing a scene. You generally find this feature in machines with a hard disk, not DVD recorders (for more on this, see *What to look for*, page 15).

■ If timeslip is less important to you or you're looking for a cheaper DVD recorder, the **OMNI DW2105** without timeslip also scored well and costs around \$400 less.

■ If you don't rent or buy DVDs or videos but are interested in recording from TV with the advantage of timeslip, an HDR is the way to go — particularly if you want to receive and record digital TV without an expensive new TV set. The **TOPFIELD TF5000PVRT** scored best of the HDRs. (A basic set-top box for receiving digital TV, without a recorder, sells for much less, as we reported last month.)

■ If you want to record and timeslip with a hard drive *plus* watch DVDs, the **HYUNDAI HY-DVDR** has a hard in each camp: it's a DVD player with a hard disk for recording.

* S = S-video, C = component video; see note 9.

** Rounded up to the next 5 mm; all protruding parts except the cord included.

† Prices are the recommended or average retail price, as provided by manufacturers in March 2004.

(A) DVD player only, with hard disk recorder.

(B) Approximate times, based on manufacturer claims and disk capacity.

(C) Only with a high-speed disk.

Brand / model (in rank order)	1 Type
PIONEER DVR-310	DVD
TOPFIELD TF5000PVRT	HDR
OMNI DW2105	DVD
HYUNDAI HY-DVDR	DVD / HDR
STRONG SRT 5390	HDR
THOMSON DTR6000AU	HDR
DIGITREX GKX-9000	DVD
HYUNDAI DVR-900A	DVD

1 Type

- DVD: DVD recorder/player.
- HDR: Digital TV tuner with a hard disk for recording.
- DVD/HDR: DVD player with a hard disk for recording.

For more on the different types, see *What's what?*, page 14.

2 Overall score

The sound and picture quality of the recordings made on all the models tested are good and very similar; we found no serious faults. Therefore we only rated the models for ease of use (90%) and standby energy consumption (10%).

3 Ease of use score

We performed various 'actual use' tasks following the instruction manuals. If a task could be done with little or no use of the instructions, the model scored better. We looked at the remote control (40%), onscreen indicators and menus (20%), front panel controls, tuning and setting up frequently used channels, recording, and timeslipping (10% each).

4 Standby energy consumption score

We measured the power each machine uses in standby mode or equivalent (when the machine's been turned off by the remote control but is still connected to power). The higher the score, the lower the energy consumption on standby.

5 Maximum recording time

This is the maximum recording time per disk with the DVD recorder set to its lowest-quality setting. Hard disk models have only one setting.

6 Timeslip

You can watch the beginning of a recording while still recording the end (See *What to look for*, page 15).

7 Channel relocate/rename

These features let you renumber (relocate) and rename channels to make them easier to find.

8 Number of recording events

This is the total number of separate times you can set the recorder to record. Repeat recording, such as every Friday at 6 pm, is counted as one event.

9 Video out

All models have composite connections (the most basic picture link to the TV). S-video gives better-quality images and component video is better again.



PERFORMANCE				FEATURES				SPECIFICATIONS				
Overall score (%)	3 Ease of use score (%)	4 Standby energy score (%)	5 Max. recording time (hours)	6 Timeslip	7 Channel relocate / rename	8 No. of recording events	9 Video out*	Dimensions (H x W x D, mm)**	Warranty (years)	Origin	Manufacturer / distributor	Price (\$)*
79	79	80	6	(C)	✓ / ✓	32	S / C	70 x 420 x 375	3	China	Pioneer	999
69	69	20	44 (B)	✓	- / ✓	70	S / C	70 x 340 x 280	1	Korea	Topfield	1099
61	61	80	6		- / -	20	S / C	90 x 430 x 310	1	China	Galas	599
68	68	5	49 (B)	✓	✓ / -	10	S	70 x 430 x 295	3	China	Yale Appliances	599
66	66	5	28 (B)	✓	✓ / -	14	S	65 x 335 x 290	1	Korea	Strong	699
64	64	5	25 (B)	✓	- / ✓	24		65 x 340 x 280	1	Taiwan	Shihiro	699
56	56	60	6		- / -	20	S / C	80 x 430 x 320	1	China	Digitrex	598
58	58	5	6		- / -	8	S / C	70 x 420 x 345	3	China	Yale Appliances	699

Profiles

Models in the *What to buy* list are profiled in rank order from left to right. Prices are recommended retail, as provided by manufacturers in March 2004.



PIONEER DVR-310

Price: \$999

GOOD POINTS

- The only DVD recorder in the test with timeslip (called 'chase play' for this model) — for more on this, see *What to look for*, page 15.
- Very easy to set up.
- Very good standby energy score.

BAD POINTS

- Recording time for a single event is limited to the DVD's capacity (unless you're there to change it) — for more on this, see *What to look for*.
- The most expensive DVD recorder in the test.



TOPFIELD TF5000PVRi

Price: \$1099

GOOD POINTS

- Timeslip.
- Twin TV tuners allow picture-in-picture and recording two channels simultaneously.

BAD POINTS

- Timeslip function isn't well explained in the instructions.
- Very poor standby energy use score.
- The most expensive of all models in the test.



HYUNDAI HY-DVDR

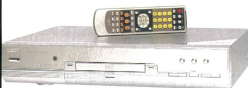
Price: \$599

GOOD POINTS

- You get the advantages of timeslip plus the ability still to play DVDs — and you can copy a DVD to its hard disk.
- The largest recording capacity of the models in this test.
- Comparatively cheap.

BAD POINTS

- Poor written instructions.
- It had problems playing the faulty DVD we created for this test, but the imperfections (deep scratches and large black dots) were very severe.
- Very poor standby energy score.



OMNI DW2105

Price: \$599

GOOD POINTS

- Very good standby energy score.
- Comparatively cheap.

BAD POINTS

- Recording time for a single event is limited to the DVD's capacity (unless you're there to change it).
- Remote control layout is rather confusing.

WHAT ABOUT THE REST?

■ There was little difference in picture and sound quality within either of the two groups of recorders we tested (digital and analogue), so none should disappoint you on that score, especially if you get one for a good price.

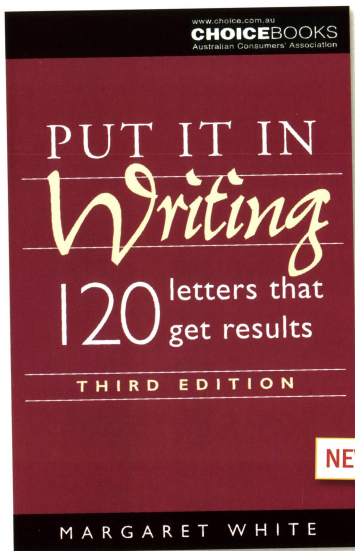
■ The **STRONG** and **THOMSON** are good-value hard disk recorders. However, they use even more energy on standby than the recommended **TOPFIELD**.

■ The **HYUNDAI DVR-900A** DVD recorder has a low standby energy score, and we couldn't tune the test sample properly to Channel 7, which is a major commercial channel in many parts of Australia.

■ The **DIGITREX** DVD recorder couldn't play our faulty DVD, but the imperfections we created for the test — deep scratches and large black dots — were much more severe than you'd normally encounter.

PAL-COMPATIBLE?

The **OMNI**, **DIGITREX** and the two **HYUNDAI** models can produce a PAL-compatible output (which you need in Australia) when playing an NTSC DVD, say from the US. With the **PIONEER** you'll need a pseudo-PAL or NTSC-compatible TV (all new PAL TVs are).



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3RD EDITION

MARGARET WHITE

How many times have you phoned to complain about a product or service and been stopped in your tracks by the words, "You'll have to put that in writing"? Using the advice and template letters in the revised edition of this bestseller you'll learn how to write effective, authoritative letters of request or complaint that *will* get a response!

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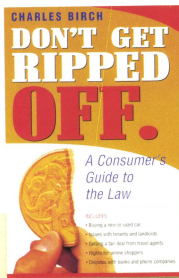
- Returning faulty goods.
- Complaining about the cost or quality of a tradesperson's work.
- Damages claims.
- Neighbourhood issues — building a fence, overhanging trees or complaints to council.
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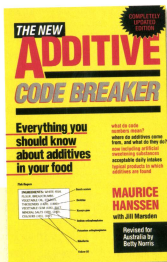
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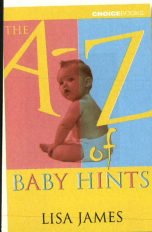
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New edition

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Lisa James

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Lisa James, author of our A-Z of Handy Hints and A-Z of Gardening Hints, has compiled this book that's overflowing with all the helpful hints and tips you try to remember but never can. Whether it's hints on air travel, babysitters, co-sleeping or just getting those ZZZZZs, you'll find a wealth of advice to help you cope with your baby or toddler.

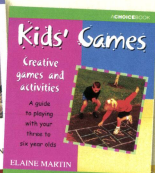
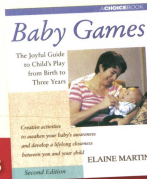
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BABY GAMES and KIDS' GAMES

These books offer hours of entertainment and education for your child, and for you — games, songs, rhymes and crafts for newborns to six-year-olds.

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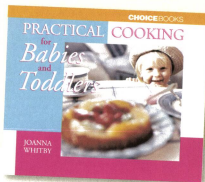


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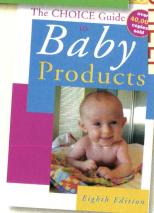


THE CHOICE GUIDE TO BABY PRODUCTS

Eighth edition

The guide to buying baby needs.

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SURVIVING YEAR 12

A sanity kit for students and their parents

Dr Michael Barr-Gregg

GREG CHAPPELL

fit for 50+

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fit for 50+

Exercises for Women who want to Live Well Longer

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GREENIOLOGY

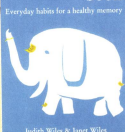
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\$29.95 CODE: GRNY



the MEMORY book

Everyday habits for a healthy memory



SMARTER PROPERTY IMPROVEMENT

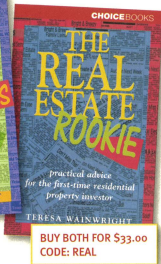
Sometimes the smartest thing you can do with a property is to improve it, other times to leave it alone. Learn how to decide what changes are worthwhile before you change anything.

\$29.95 CODE: SPIM

THE MEMORY BOOK

Getting forgetful as you age doesn't necessarily mean you have Alzheimer's. This book explains how your memory works, what can go wrong with it, and how to maximise its full potential.

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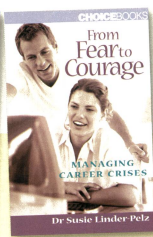
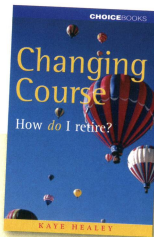
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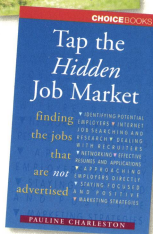
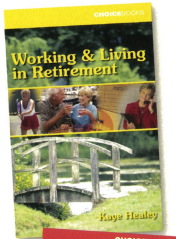
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CB/0406

Food ... or medicine?

Good health out of a packet? Don't believe it.

IN A NUTSHELL

Health claims on processed foods help no-one but the people trying to sell them. For consumers they're at best simplistic and at worst lead you up the garden path.

Fat, fibre, calcium and — most recently — GI claims offer some classic examples of labels providing more hype than information (see pages 22 and 23).

“Fibre actively working to maintain a healthy digestive system” ... “Omega-3 for early brain and eye development” ... “Low GI for better long-term health”. These are just a few of the exaggerated claims we've found on food labels. For some manufacturers, it seems, food's not just food any more — it's medicine.

But according to the current Food Standards Code, health claims aren't allowed. Labels may not, for example, include a reference to any disease or health condition. (There's just one exception — claims made in connection with foods fortified with folate to prevent some birth defects. Curiously, this was the hardest to find on the supermarket shelves!)

One good argument against health claims on food labels is that they're too simplistic to help you decide what to buy in any meaningful way. In many cases the evidence is still inconclusive about an ingredient's health effects, and diet-related diseases have many different causes.

And according to research carried out on behalf of the UK Food Standards Agency (the UK equivalent of our food regulator, FSANZ), health claims on food labels often leave consumers confused or unclear about what to expect from the products.

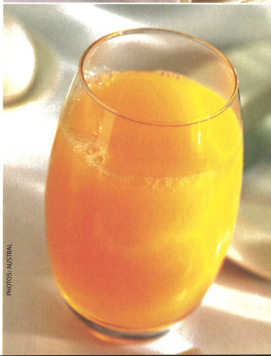
However, under pressure from the food industry to allow health claims, and following approval from the appropriate Commonwealth, state and territory ministers, FSANZ is in the process of drafting new regulations to let some onto food labels. However, it seems plenty of manufacturers can't wait.

We went looking for samples of health claims already out in the supermarkets and had no trouble finding them. Hopefully new regulations will at least sharpen the focus and pull some of these snake-oil-type claims into line.

CLAIMS ALREADY OUT THERE

On a quick trawl through just one Sydney supermarket, our food team found 30 products that seem to be making some sort of health claim on the label. The most frequent related to omega-3 fats and heart health, dietary fibre and calcium for strong bones (see pages 22–23). Questions of legality aside, our major concerns, after checking the claims against the latest scientific evidence, are that:

- Claims aren't always based on sound science. Perhaps not surprisingly, the promotional hype can be well ahead of the evidence.
- There's often not enough of the ingredient (fibre, calcium or whatever) to be of any significant benefit.
- They're often made for highly processed foods, whereas one thing nutritionists are sure of is that a healthy diet needs fresh fruit and vegetables and wholegrain cereals. (For more on healthy eating, see CHOICE, March 2003.)
- Claims can be worded so as to appear to promise a lot, but if you analyse what they're really saying they're in fact almost meaningless.



PHOTOS: AUSTRAL

HOW IT'S DONE ELSEWHERE

Many countries prohibit health claims altogether, but there are some notable exceptions. In the UK, claims are allowed, but they must be true and mustn't be misleading.

In the US, the Food and Drug Administration permits health claims as long as, among other criteria, there's convincing scientific evidence to back them. Currently there are 12 types of claim that can be made in the US, including some (but by no means all) of the claims we found here.

Even if Australia were to adopt a similar approach to the UK or US, it'd require stringent monitoring and follow-up processes to give the regulations teeth. Australia's track record on this kind of approach with the food industry isn't encouraging.

KEEPING THEM HONEST

The information on food labels should help you — all consumers — make genuinely informed choices, not merely offer simplistic and often unproven claims. Health claims need to be regulated and monitored to stop you being led to believe inconclusive evidence about a food's effect on your diet and wellbeing, and/or be ripped off spending money on some food item for the wrong reasons.

CHOICE is fighting hard to protect consumers from questionable claims and is actively involved in the discussions. We'll also be keeping a close eye on future developments in this area, particularly the types of claims manufacturers want to make and the level of scrutiny they're subjected to. ■

Dietary fibre

THE FACTS

Experts agree that you need at least 30 g of fibre a day. There's now strong evidence that fibre (particularly insoluble fibre from foods like wheat bran, wholegrain cereals and wholemeal breads) can protect us against bowel cancer, and there are probably numerous other benefits. There's also evidence of soluble fibre protecting us from heart disease: in the US, food manufacturers are allowed to claim that the soluble fibre found in oat bran may reduce the risk of heart disease.

CLAIMS WE FOUND

■ **GREEN'S Barley Bran:** "Research conducted by the CSIRO Division of Human Nutrition has shown that Barley Bran is equivalent to Oat Bran in its ability to lower plasma cholesterol levels."

This may well be true, but you need to know how much soluble fibre it contains for the claim to be useful.

■ **UNCLE TOBYS Healthwise cereal for your bowel and digestive system:** "... three fibres, actively working to help maintain the wellbeing of the bowel and digestive system."

Sounds good — but it doesn't amount to much when you try to work out what it really means.

Omega-3 fats

THE FACTS

There's good evidence that omega-3 fats can help prevent heart disease: the Heart Foundation recommends eating at least two fish meals a week to get enough marine omega-3 fats (called EPA and DHA) to significantly reduce the risk of heart disease, preferably oily fish such as mackerel and atlantic salmon. It recommends eating plant omega-3 fats (ALA) as well — at least 2 g per day, which you can get from soya beans, green vegetables, linseed or canola oil.

CLAIMS WE FOUND

■ **DAIRY FARMERS Farmers Best milk,** "now with the added benefit of Omega 3 DHA in every serve is a deliciously simple way to look after your heart."

One 250 mL serving only has at most 31.2 mg of EPA and DHA, which is no more than 6% of what's needed per day to benefit heart health.

■ **COLES High Top bread with Omega-3:** "The Heart Foundation recommends to include sources of Omega-3 as part of a balanced diet."

Sure it does — but one serve (two slices) of this bread has only 37 mg of EPA and DHA — again, only about 7% of what's needed.

■ **BUTTERCUP Wonder White + Omega-3 DHA bread:** "Still with twice the fibre of regular white bread and now with the added benefit of Omega-3 DHA for early brain and eye development and heart health."

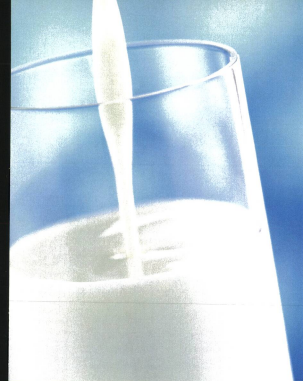
There's some evidence that EPA and DHA are good for brain and eye development in growing children, but as yet it's far from conclusive. Another problem is that one serving (two slices) contains only 34 mg of EPA and DHA — less than 7% of what's needed for good heart health.

■ **BROWNES Heart Plus milk drink** "has been specially formulated to improve the performance of the heart and cardiovascular system as part of a balanced diet with regular physical activity."

This product does better. One serve (250 mL) contains around 30% of our daily requirement of EPA and DHA.

■ **GOLD'N CANOLA margarine:** "This product contains essential Omega-3 which your body needs daily but can't produce. Omega-3 is beneficial to heart function and general wellbeing."

This product contains ALA, but one 5 g serve has only about 12% of the 2 g/day recommended by the Heart Foundation, so you'd need to eat two tablespoons a day.



Calcium

THE FACTS

Bones and teeth contain 99% of your body's calcium, but it also helps regulate blood pressure, and a small amount circulates in the bloodstream. If you don't get enough calcium from your food it's withdrawn from the bones, causing osteoporosis. Women prior to menopause and men need about 0.8 g a day to keep their bones in good condition. Women past the menopause need 1 g and pregnant women should aim for 1.1 g in the last trimester; 1.2 g when you're breastfeeding. Children and teenagers also need plenty of calcium because their bones are growing — around 0.7–1.2 g per day, depending on their age.

CLAIMS WE FOUND

■ **BUTTERCUP Wonder White + Calcium** "with *Twice the Fibre of regular white bread has CALCIUM too! The CALCIUM, like the FIBRE, is invisible so your family can get all the benefits without even knowing it ... isn't that wonderful?*"

Wonderful indeed — but one serve (two slices) has only about 18% of even the lowest 800 mg recommended daily amount of calcium.

■ **AUSTRALIAN FRESH Plus Premium Orange with Calcium** "contains seaweed, an ideal non-dairy source of calcium for everybody ..."

One recommended serve (400 mL — the whole bottle) delivers half of the 800 mg daily requirement. But orange juice isn't normally a good source of calcium, and adding it (and other vitamins and minerals) to foods that don't normally contain them might give some people a misleading impression of where to find them normally in a balanced diet.

■ **KELLOGG'S Nutri-Grain** has "Calcium needed for strong healthy bones".

It does, but one 30 g serve only provides 10% of the 800 mg daily requirement. In fact you get a lot more from the milk you pour on it (or any other cereal).

Glycaemic index

THE FACTS

The glycaemic index (GI) is a way of ranking carbohydrate foods according to their effects on blood glucose. Foods with a low GI (such as whole grains, pasta and most legumes) make our blood glucose rise and fall gently. High-GI foods (such as white bread and potatoes) are broken down quickly by our bodies and cause the blood glucose levels to surge and then crash. Some nutritionists now think these surges in blood glucose can affect our long-term health.

But GI is still 'work in progress' when it comes to what effect — if any — it has on your health. If you have diabetes, there's good evidence that you should be considering GI as a factor in making healthy food choices. But, as yet, there's no compelling evidence that a low-GI diet will help healthy people lose weight or reduce the risk of heart disease. (For more on this, see CHOICE, April 2004.)

CLAIMS WE FOUND

■ **SUNRICE Doongara CleverRice** "has a lower glycaemic index (or GI) than regular rice so it is digested more slowly by the body, helping you to stay fuller for longer and providing a sustained energy release".

The label doesn't tell us the GI value, so there's no means of assessing this claim. But whatever the GI, there's no conclusive scientific evidence for believing this rice will help us stay fuller for longer than any other.

■ **SO NATURAL Calci Forte Soy Milk:** "Low glycaemic index (GI) for better long-term health."

As noted, there's no scientific justification so far for believing that low-GI foods are healthier, unless you have diabetes. And again, you're not told what the GI-value is.

SOMEONE ELSE'S DEBTS?

Following our article on problems with the credit reporting system in CHOICE, Jan/Feb 2004, we recently conducted an online and phone survey (with the NSW Consumer Credit Legal Centre) about debt collection.

As in the credit reporting article, we found that debts to telecommunications companies (telcos) are a significant problem. Overall, debt to a telco topped the list, with 33% of respondents reporting they were being pursued for this type of debt.

And small debts can damage your credit report just as much as bigger ones: telco debts were typically for smaller amounts than other debts — 50% of debts for less than \$500 were with a telco. But they also had the highest instance of being disputed — 40% believed they didn't in fact owe the money.

A common reason for disputes about any debt was being mistaken for someone else. As one respondent said, "The debt collector kept insisting I was someone else. When I rang the telecommunications company to complain about their debt collector, they were not only unhelpful, but also rude and insulting."

For the full report check *Debt collection survey* (a free report) on www.choice.com.au/mr.

Come out on top at tax time

Another financial year is nearly over — it's time to get your finances on track. Doing your taxes might seem like a burden, but it pays to know how to get the most out of your return. So what can you do next financial year to minimise tax costs while maximising your refund?

- Structure your finances to minimise tax while staying within the law. Strategies such as salary packaging, negative gearing on investments and income splitting (where you buy investments in the name of the family member with the lowest taxable income) may help reduce the tax you have to pay. But with negative gearing in particular, don't forget there are also risks involved in borrowing to buy an investment, such as property — don't overstretch yourself.
- Keep all records and receipts. This makes it easier to work out what you can claim. It also helps track of how you spend your money — a handy budgeting tool.
- Take full advantage of any deductions, payments and offsets you're entitled to. Some to be aware of include the baby bonus, family tax benefit, the new superannuation co-contribution and the medical expenses offset.

Finally, if you want to use a tax agent, shop around and get a few quotes before making a choice. Find out how they charge and check they're appropriately qualified and have experience with your type of tax situation.

You can find out more about getting the most out of your tax return in the June issue of CHOICE *Money & Rights*. To subscribe call 1800 069 552 or go to www.choice.com.au/magazines.



Car hire traps for older drivers

Ken Taylor and his wife Marilyn recently rented a car from **THRIFTY**. While the contract was in Marilyn's name, both wanted to drive. However, when Ken, 75, who's been a licensed driver for over 50 years, showed his licence at the counter he was told that because of his age the company wouldn't let him drive the car.

"I was unhappy about not being told beforehand. In different circumstances this could prove embarrassing for an older driver if they didn't have another person to drive the car."

We asked some major car rental companies about their policy on older drivers and found the following restrictions (our scenario was for an intermediate-sized car in Sydney; different restrictions could apply in other locations or for different types of vehicle):

- **THRIFTY** and **APOLLO** don't allow drivers over 75.
- **BRITZ** and **MAUI** allow drivers over 75 only with a medical certificate.
- **AVIS**, **BAYSWATER**, **BUDGET**, **EUROPCAR** and **HERTZ** don't have a maximum age.

The April edition of our new magazine, CHOICE *Money & Rights*, has an in-depth article on rental car traps — see above if you'd like to subscribe.



TAMARA GRAHAM

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HOW TO USE THIS INDEX

Bold type indicates a test, survey or trial report, normal type indicates other reports.

* Indicates an update of a previous report, additions or corrections to reports, small follow-up items, recalls or letters. For space reasons, the index generally doesn't include Choice Cuts, many other small pieces, and Recalls and Bans.

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Sparkling wine and champagne Dec 01, Dec 03
Split-system air conditioners Oct 01, Oct 03, May 04*
Sports mouthguards Jul 02, Dec 02*
Sports water Jan/Feb 04
Spreads, dairy and margarine Aug 01
Stain removers
carpet Sep 02
pre-wash Nov 02
Steam irons Jan/Feb 03
Steam mops Apr 01
Steam oven, Brandt Nov 03
Strollers
jogger Aug 02, Dec 02*, Jan/Feb 04
layback Aug 00, Aug 03
Suitcases, carry-on trolley Oct 00
Sunglasses Aug 03, Oct 03*
Sunscreens Nov 03
Supernatation Sep 01, May 02, Oct 02*, Oct 03, Dec 03*

Supermarket
price survey Dec 00, Jul 03
sales tactics May 04
Surround-sound systems Sep 02

Tea, pesticide residues in May 03
Teabags Sep 00
Telephones — see Phones

Television
51 cm Apr 01, Apr 03, Aug 03*
68 cm Aug 00, Nov 02, Nov 03
digital Aug 00, Dec 00*, May 01
digital set-top boxes Apr 02, Apr 04
flat-screen Apr 01
plasma screens Mar 04, May 04*
widescreen Apr 02
Tents, dome Apr 01

Toasters
four-slice Apr 01
two-slice Mar 04
Toilet paper Jul 01
Toothbrushes Sep 03
electric Nov 01
Toothpaste Jun 01

Travel
deals, flights Aug 02, Jan/Feb 03*, Jun 03*
insurance Nov 00, Jan/Feb 01*, Mar 01*, Nov 01, Mar 03*, Apr 03*, Nov 03

Trimmers
hedge Oct 02
lawn Nov 00, Nov 02
Trolley suitcases, carry-on Oct 00
Tuna, tinned Jan/Feb 04
Two-minute noodles Mar 01
Tyre and brake service chains Oct 01
Tyres May 02, Oct 02*, May 03

Vaccination — see Immunisation
Vacuum cleaners
cheaper Jul 00, Aug 01, Jul 03
expensive Jul 02
handheld Jul 00
Vacuum flasks Aug 02

Video equipment
digital camcorders Nov 01, Jan/Feb 02*, Jan/Feb 03, Apr 03*, Dec 03
DVD and hard disk recorders Jun 04
DVD players May 01, Jul 01*, Dec 01, Dec 02, Apr 03*, Dec 03
portable May 04
DVD technology Dec 01
VCRs Jan/Feb 01, Apr 01*, May 01*, Jan/Feb 02
videotapes Dec 01
Vinegar May 02
Virus checkers Aug 02, Apr 03

Wall ovens, electric, multi-function Oct 01
WAP (Wireless Application Protocol) technology Apr 01
Warming tray, food Nov 01
Washing machines Jul 00, May 01, Sep 01, Jan/Feb 02, Mar 02*, May 02, Jul 02*, Sep 02, Mar 03, Sep 03, Nov 03*, Mar 04
Washing-up liquids Apr 03
Water blasters Apr 02
Water filters Mar 03, May 03*
Water in your diet Oct 01
Water heaters
choosing Oct 03
gas instantaneous Oct 03
Water, sports Jan/Feb 04
Water supply May 04
Watering kits, garden Sep 00
Web / www — see Internet
Wedges, potato Sep 03
Wills, making one Apr 04
Wine
champagne and sparkling Dec 01, Dec 03
red blends Dec 02
shiraz Dec 00
Wrinkle creams Mar 03

Masses of MOBILES

With the choice of mobile phone models larger than ever, we help you find the best model for you.

Mobile phones these days offer much more than just making and receiving calls. They allow you to send text (SMS) or multimedia messages (MMS), and some function as a mobile office or entertainment device.

That's why we've revised our scoring model. Our overall score is now made up of 11 factors, which allows you to pick a model that does well in the areas important to you. For example, if you need a very portable phone with good SMS, MMS and mobile office performance, the most appropriate models may not be in our *Top performers* list — but you can search for them in our table (page 34).

The tested models can be used on the Australian digital GSM (Global System for Mobile Communications) networks from Telstra, Optus and Vodafone. And GSM is also widely used overseas, so chances are you can take your mobile with you and use it when you travel if you wish. (This is called roaming — check with your network provider which countries it has roaming agreements with, and how much it'll cost you.)

However, if you use your mobile a lot outside major centres in Australia, GSM may not be the best choice for you because of its limited coverage in such areas compared to the CDMA network (see CHOICE, November 2003, or go to www.choiceextra.com.au under 'Mobile phones' for our test of CDMA handsets).

MAIN RESULTS

■ **Battery** capacity has generally managed to keep up well with increasing power demands for additional features and functions, such as a large colour display. However, our time-in-use test is based on phone calls. Other functions, such as messaging and playing games, are likely to have higher power demands, so the battery will run out sooner.

■ **Sensitivity:** While handsets are improving in general, some models can deal better with weak signals than others. If you use your phone a lot in areas with poor coverage, look for a model with a comparatively high sensitivity score.

■ **Ease of use:** Basic everyday functions are usually easy enough to manage with most of the tested models. However, the phones have an increasing number of sometimes complex functions, and more often than not the menus to access and manage those functions aren't very intuitive.

A small handset can be carried around more easily but also often means small keys, and some modern

IN A NUTSHELL

Most of the 38 phones tested do their main job — taking and making phone calls — OK. The trick is to get one within your budget that has the features you want, and is available with a plan that's right for you.

To help you pick a model, go to www.choiceextra.com.au and click on 'pick a mobile phone' under 'Mobile phones' in the index. 

Our online phone plan calculator helps you find the best plan for your call pattern. For a limited time it's also available free to personal CHOICE subscribers at www.choiceextra.com.au — click on 'pick a plan' under 'Mobile phones' in the index. 



TOP PERFORMERS

SAMSUNG SGH-E500	\$599
NOKIA 6100	\$449
NOKIA 6220	\$699
SAMSUNG SGH-E100	\$679
LG G7100	\$600

keypad designs have moved away from the classic key layout. Check the models you're interested in before you buy, and see what you're comfortable with.

■ **Sound quality:** While we found fairly big differences between models in the technical test results, the range was narrower in our real-life user panel test. The overall standard of sound quality is good, and factors such as network or atmospheric conditions can have a bigger impact than the difference between handsets.

■ **Durability:** All the tested handsets are tough little critters — we found some minor physical damage after our severe tumble test, but none of the phones was left unusable.

We also tested how well the phones cope with water and humidity (see note 7, page 33, for details). While some models had problems right after the test, almost all recovered once they were allowed to dry again. Only the **ALCATEL OT332** suffered permanent damage.

RADIATION EXPOSURE

In Australia, all new mobiles carry an A-tick label, which means they meet the Australian safety limit for radio frequency exposure. So, according to the Australian Mobile Telecommunications Association (AMTA), they can all be considered equally safe.

An analysis into the current state of research into potential health effects of mobile phones (see page 36) concluded that no study has produced any repeatable identifiable risk, and that the reasonable use of a mobile phone isn't anything you should worry about.

However, if you're still concerned, pick a model with particularly low emissions (see the table). All new phones come with information (in their manual or a separate brochure) about their specific absorption rate (SAR) — the amount of radio-frequency energy absorbed by the body when you're using the phone.

Continued on page 32

Features and functions

FEATURES IN THE TABLE

See the table, page 34, for which model has which features:

■ **MMS:** This stands for 'multimedia messaging service', and allows you to send/forward and receive picture and sound messages. You can send an MMS message to another MMS-compatible phone (and the recipient can watch it or listen to it on their phone), to a non-MMS-compatible phone (the recipient can access the message on the network provider's website), or to any email address.

What type of message you can create yourself depends on your phone's technology: Many phones have a built-in **digital camera** or allow you to attach one, so you can take digital photos and send them on. If your handset has **voice recording**, you can also record voice messages and send them on, and record voice memos and reminders.

■ **Voice dialling:** Allows you to record a word (for example, the name of the person) together with a phone number, and to dial the number by saying that word.

■ **Hands-free use:** Models with this feature have a speakerphone that allows you to make a call without holding the handset. This can be useful when you're driving, for example (although you're not recommended to drive at all while making a long or involved call), or when several people want to listen to a call.

■ **Triband** models can be used on the 1900 MHz frequency band used in the US and Canada as well as on the two bands available in Australia (see below) — a must if you're planning to use your mobile there.

ALL MODELS HAVE ...

■ **Colour display,** except the **NOKIA 1100**, **SIEMENS A55** and **SONY ERICSSON T100**.

■ **Vibration alert:** You can set the phone to vibrate instead of ring — useful if you need to have your phone on while you're in a meeting or

restaurant, where a ringing phone would bother others.

■ **Polyphonic ring tones.** You can download additional ring tones for all but the **NOKIA 1100**, **SAMSUNG SGH-E100**, and **SONY ERICSSON T100**.

■ **Li-ion or Li-polymer battery.**

■ **Dual band:** They can operate in both the 900 MHz and 1800 MHz frequency bands used by Australian and many overseas GSM networks.

■ **SMS:** Allows you to send and receive short text messages (also see MMS, left).

■ **Phonebook memory** on the phone.

■ At least eight one- or two-touch **fast-dial memories** (except the **SAGEM MY X-6**, which has only one).

■ **Alarm.**

■ **GPRS:** This stands for 'general packet radio service', and is a faster version of WAP (see below). It allows you access to web-like services available over the mobile network. You can use your mobile to receive and display information on certain topics (such as the weather, sports results or the share market), buy goods or book tickets, and send and receive email. Information can be accessed more quickly than with WAP, and you're charged for the amount of information you download rather than the time you're connected. Only the **ALCATEL OT332**, **NOKIA 1100**, **SIEMENS A55** and **SONY ERICSSON T100** don't have GPRS.

■ **WAP** (except the **NOKIA 1100**): This stands for 'wireless application protocol', and gives you access to the same functions as GPRS, above. However, WAP is quite slow, and you're charged for the time you're connected to download information.



Profiles

The top performers are profiled in rank order. Prices are recommended retail, as provided by manufacturers in April 2004.

SAMSUNG SGH-S500

Price: \$599

Small and lightweight phone that has the equal longest battery life (for phone calls) and easy-to-use everyday functions, but is comparatively low on features.

NOKIA 6220

Price: \$699

Very well equipped phone with good battery life, the best sensitivity in the test, built-in digital camera and good games capability.



SAMSUNG SGH-E300

Price: \$679

A small and lightweight phone with solid performance across all aspects, but comparatively low on features.



NOKIA 6100

Price: \$449

A lightweight phone with a solid performance across most aspects of our tests.



LG G7100

Price: \$600

A small phone with the easiest-to-use everyday functions, it's also very durable. It has a built-in digital camera.



WHAT ABOUT THE REST?

The top performers are the best models overall, but you're likely to be happy with most of the others if they have the features and functions you want. Which model you choose will depend on your budget and needs. If a particular performance aspect, a specific feature or small size is essential for you, a model further down the table than the top performers, but which doesn't have any major weakness, may be the one for you. For example:

If extra-long battery life is important for you, the **SONY ERICSSON P900** and **Z600** are worth considering as well as the top-scoring **SAMSUNG SGH-S500**.

If you use your phone a lot in areas with poor reception, the **SAMSUNG SGH-X100**, **MOTOROLA MPx200** and **NOKIA 1100** are among the best for sensitivity (though no better than the top-performing **NOKIA 6100** and **6220**).

The most common functions on the **LG G7050** and **MOTOROLA MPx200** are very easy to use, though the top-performing **LG G7100** gets the best score for this.

If you want to use your phone as a mobile office, you can't do better than the **SONY ERICSSON P900**.

If playing games is an important part of your phone use, check out the **NOKIA 7250**.

Rating the makers' ethics

If you don't have any special requirements and think one mobile phone is as good as any other these days, another way to choose could be based on the corporate responsibility performance of the manufacturers — in other words, their ethics.

A number of our European partner organisations carried out a survey into the corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives of seven major mobile phone manufacturers. Aspects of CSR include the following.

■ **Environment:** Does the company have an environmental policy and management scheme to control and monitor pollution, hazardous substances, energy saving and recycling? Is this supported throughout the supply chain?

■ **Labour conditions:** Does the company have a code of conduct for working conditions, health and safety, wages, benefits, rights to collective bargaining, and non-discrimination? Is this code effectively monitored, ideally by a third party?

■ **Social:** Does the company actively prevent bribery and corruption in its activities?

■ **Consumer:** Does the company research the radiation effects of mobile phones and share the results with the industry and consumers?

■ **Transparency:** Is all this information easily available to the public?

Only four of the seven companies responded fully to the survey, despite several reminders. Where companies didn't respond, as much information as possible was gathered from public sources, such as annual reports and websites.

Sadly, no manufacturer is yet doing all it could, and each has weaknesses in its CSR initiatives. The summaries are taken from the UK consumer magazine *Which?*, and are listed from best to worst.

SOME ETHICAL INITIATIVES

NOKIA, MOTOROLA, PHILIPS AND ALCATEL all answered the survey and have some corporate social responsibility initiatives — but all could do more.

■ **NOKIA** provided the most information on CSR initiatives — but there's still room for improvement. It was very co-operative and gave the most detailed information about



Many new GSM mobile phones now have a built-in digital camera. A sliding lid, like on the Motorola E365 pictured, protects the camera lens when you're not using it.

From page 30

The published SAR figure is based on the phone working at maximum power. This is a worst-case value and doesn't reflect your exposure in everyday use, as mobile phones continuously adapt to the minimum power required to make a call in order to optimise battery life. For more information, check AMTA's website on www.amta.org.au/sar.

PHONE RECYCLING

If you have a phone, battery or accessories you want to get rid of, don't throw them in the bin. That's especially true for older-style NiCad batteries, which shouldn't end up in landfill because cadmium is toxic and might leak into waterways and damage the environment. None of the tested models has a NiCad battery (see *Features and functions*, page 30).

However, all battery types and the phone's circuit boards and plastic housing contain resources that can be recovered and reused.

There's a free recycling scheme initiated by AMTA. You can return your old phone, battery and accessories to any retail outlet featuring the symbol pictured on the left.



how it implements environmental and health and safety measures throughout the production and supply chain. It claims that it and its suppliers guarantee the minimum or 'living' wage, but this wasn't backed up with hard evidence. Good-quality environmental and consumer information is publicly available.

■ **MOTOROLA** gave a complete picture of its production and supply chain, indicating where major components originate. All of its sites, and those of its suppliers, have a certified and externally audited environmental management scheme. It has a code of conduct regarding labour for suppliers, including paying the minimum wage, but provided no evidence of monitoring this. There is good CSR information on its website.

■ **PHILIPS** needed several reminders but did provide details of production and supply, right down to individual factories. About 88% of its own production sites have certified and externally audited environmental management schemes, but suppliers regulate environmental compliance themselves. **PHILIPS** monitors labour conditions among suppliers, but it could do more. CSR information is available on its website, but there are no details about handset radiation.

■ **ALCATEL** operates in 130 countries — more than any other

manufacturer that replied. It has certified and externally audited environmental management schemes at 70% of its production sites, and selects suppliers that comply with environmental standards (though this isn't monitored). **ALCATEL** didn't provide detailed information about its production and supply chain, for "confidentiality reasons", or how labour and health conditions are checked. There's plenty of CSR information on its website.

NO INFORMATION

SAMSUNG, SIEMENS and **SONY ERICSSON** didn't respond to the survey.

■ The **SONY ERICSSON** joint venture doesn't have a well integrated CSR reporting strategy. The **SONY ERICSSON** website contains phone radiation information, but refers users to the separate **SONY** and **ERICSSON** websites for reports on environmental and social issues.

■ Information about **SIEMENS'** environmental and social policy is publicly available, though the code of conduct on its website is quite general and doesn't address the production and supply chain in detail. But it does publish full radiation information for its models.

■ There's no detailed information about the practices of **SAMSUNG** and its suppliers. Its last environmental report dates from 2000, and its website contains no details of handset radiation.

NOTES TO THE TABLE (overleaf)

1 Overall score

The overall score is based on a combination of the following scores:

- Battery life: 20%
- Sensitivity: 16%
- Everyday use: 12%
- Ergonomics: 6%
- SMS: 10%
- Sound quality: 12%
- Portability: 8%
- Durability: 6%
- MMS: 5%
- Use as a mobile office: 2.5%
- Use for games and fun: 2.5%

2 Battery score

This score is mainly based on the time-in-use result (see note 10), but we also considered the charging time and battery status warning.

3 Sensitivity score

We measured the phones' reception and sending power in both the 900 MHz and 1800 MHz bands.

4 Everyday use / ergonomics / SMS scores

A user panel assessed the following:

- Instruction manual.
- Everyday use (such as ease of answering a call, storing a number into memory and dialling a number stored in memory).

■ Ergonomic features, such as the ease of using the keys and menus.

■ SMS use (writing and receiving an SMS, and suitability of the display for SMS).

5 Sound quality score

For both incoming and outgoing calls, we carried out a number of acoustic measurements, such as frequency response. In addition, a user panel subjectively rated the sound quality of calls.

6 Portability score

Among other things we assessed the weight and size of the phones and the ease of locking and unlocking the keypad.

7 Durability score

■ **Shock resistance:** We put the phones in an 80 cm diameter barrel that was then turned, simulating falls from, say, a table or out of a shirt pocket. After five, 15 and 25 turns the phones were checked for damage. There was a maximum of 50 falls. This is a fairly severe test.

■ **Water resistance:** We tested the phones in hot, damp conditions, and carried out a rain test.

■ **Workmanship:** We assessed the build quality of the phones.

8 MMS score

Where applicable, we assessed the phone's digital

camera, and how suitable its display is for MMS purposes. If a phone isn't MMS-compatible it didn't score zero; instead the weighting for the MMS score was distributed evenly across all the other scores.

9 Mobile office / games and fun scores

We checked each phone against a list of features and functions that make it particularly useful for these purposes.

10 Time in use

We checked how long the supplied battery lasted in our simulated usage cycle: for 10 hours a day we made one three-minute call per hour, and left the phone on standby between calls. We switched the phone off for the remaining 14 hours. This test is more meaningful and realistic than the maximum talk time that's often quoted by manufacturers.

These results depend on network conditions, so are comparative only. Also, if you use a different battery, the times are likely to be different.

11 Features

See *Features and functions*, page 30, for an explanation of these.

12 Claimed SAR

The specific absorption rate as claimed by the manufacturer. See *Radiation exposure*, page 30, for more information.

PERFORMANCE

Brand / model (in rank order)	1 Overall score (%)	2 Battery score (%)	3 Sensitivity score (%)	4 Everyday use score (%)	4 Ergonomics score (%)	4 SMS score (%)	5 Sound quality score (%)	6 Portability score (%)	7 Durability score (%)	8 MMS score (%)	9 Mob office (%)
SAMSUNG SGH-S500	74	86	70	86	58	74	68	81	74	na	44
NOKIA 6100	72	71	77	72	75	78	62	84	72	65	52
NOKIA 6220	72	80	78	77	58	74	63	75	68	56	61
SAMSUNG SGH-E100	72	71	76	82	59	73	72	83	71	60	44
LG G7100	71	70	70	91	55	69	70	70	79	67	46
LG G7050	70	75	67	89	57	61	67	75	75	64	46
NOKIA 7250	70	79	61	76	74	78	59	78	66	61	52
SAMSUNG SGH-X600	70	71	73	76	64	58	64	81	70	63	44
SONY ERICSSON P900	70	84	67	64	66	86	65	38	69	74	91
SONY ERICSSON Z600	70	86	70	71	62	67	57	59	72	67	76
SAMSUNG SGH-E700	69	68	67	82	60	73	67	78	63	69	44
SAMSUNG SGH-X100	69	69	78	77	67	69	59	76	76	54	37
ALCATEL OT735	68	65	74	62	65	84	65	76	70	60	52
MOTOROLA MPx200	68	64	77	87	56	75	56	57	76	61	70
MOTOROLA V878	68	67	67	80	55	67	61	84	76	61	52
NEC e232	67	66	74	78	48	60	64	71	85	51	46
NOKIA 1100	67	78	77	60	67	62	56	77	67	na	18
NOKIA 3200	67	65	69	72	65	78	57	75	66	57	52
SIEMENS SL55	67	59	68	85	55	64	65	83	68	51	65
SONY ERICSSON T610	67	78	61	66	68	66	53	70	77	61	70
MOTOROLA V300	66	60	70	81	49	72	64	58	72	71	50
MOTOROLA V600	66	65	69	78	53	72	58	57	72	67	61
NOKIA 6600	66	71	71	61	67	75	59	46	63	70	78
PANASONIC X70	66	57	68	77	54	59	63	76	85	60	76
SIEMENS M55	66	60	68	78	60	66	62	78	75	54	59
SIEMENS MC60	66	62	70	80	68	63	61	73	63	55	52
SONY ERICSSON T630	66	73	61	60	66	67	53	72	74	71	70
SIEMENS C60	65	63	70	76	69	66	59	72	65	54	35
SONY ERICSSON T230	65	64	73	63	65	58	62	78	77	56	35
SAGEM MY X-6	64	75	72	49	50	68	55	62	74	71	50
SIEMENS A55	64	60	73	72	60	57	61	79	74	na	18
SIEMENS ST55	64	59	69	65	58	68	54	75	78	65	52
SIEMENS SX-1	63	57	69	63	47	71	65	53	60	74	80
MOTOROLA E365	62	67	56	74	59	51	53	73	73	72	37
SONY ERICSSON T100	62	66	69	57	60	59	51	85	76	na	18
SONY ERICSSON Z200	62	55	64	70	52	69	59	65	80	na	42
ALCATEL OT332	61	62	73	63	67	38	60	81	51	na	18
PANASONIC EB-G51	61	53	68	76	44	64	46	82	66	na	35

* Including battery.

** With closed lid where applicable.

† Recommended retail, as provided by manufacturers in March 2004.

na Not applicable.

(A) Attachable camera available.

(B) Six months on battery.



11 FEATURES

SPECIFICATIONS

Times Fun (%)	10 Time in use (h)	Charge time (min)	MMS	Built-in digital camera	Voice recording	Voice dialling	Hands-free use	Triband	12 Claimed SAR (W/kg)	Antenna	Weight* (g)	Dimensions (L x W x D, mm)**	Warranty (years)	Manufacturer / distributor	Price (\$)
	76	115							0.78	Fixed	84	83 x 44 x 24	1 (B)	Samsung	599
	58	70	✓	(A)			✓	✓	0.85	Internal	77	102 x 43 x 17	1	Nokia	449
	78	80	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	0.66	Internal	93	106 x 46 x 19	1	Nokia	699
	55	99	✓						0.93	Fixed	84	83 x 46 x 22	1 (B)	Samsung	679
	61	136	✓	✓	✓	✓			0.14	Fixed	102	90 x 49 x 24	1	LG Electronics	600
	76	137	✓	✓	✓	✓			0.64	Fixed	92	94 x 45 x 22	1	LG Electronics	700
	71	80	✓	✓			✓	✓	0.91	Internal	87	106 x 45 x 19	1	Nokia	599
	61	120	✓	✓					1.51	Fixed	79	102 x 43 x 20	1 (B)	Samsung	599
	110	137	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	0.91	Internal	154	115 x 59 x 25	1	Sony Ericsson	1689
	92	125	✓	✓	✓				0.16	Internal	111	90 x 48 x 28	1	Sony Ericsson	879
	63	134	✓	✓	✓				0.75	Internal	89	90 x 46 x 25	1 (B)	Samsung	899
	62	134	✓						0.71	Internal	85	110 x 46 x 20	1 (B)	Samsung	399
	67	201	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		0.57	Internal	90	106 x 47 x 21	1	Alcatel	279
	44	145	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	0.12	Internal	119	89 x 48 x 28	1	Motorola	848
	54	134	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	0.70	Fixed	79	82 x 43 x 21	1	Motorola	788
	54	143	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	1.48	Internal	91	91 x 46 x 25	1 (B)	NEC	681
	75	200							0.67	Internal	87	106 x 46 x 20	1	Nokia	199
	65	178	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	0.56	Internal	94	107 x 45 x 21	1	Nokia	409
	43	83	✓	(A)	✓	✓	✓	✓	0.62	Internal	77	82 x 45 x 22	1 (B)	Siemens	899
	65	139	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	1.50	Internal	94	102 x 44 x 20	1	Sony Ericsson	845
	57	200	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	0.93	Fixed	122	90 x 49 x 26	1	Motorola	585
	68	219	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	0.57	Fixed	126	89 x 49 x 25	1	Motorola	900
	63	88	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	0.80	Internal	125	109 x 58 x 24	1	Nokia	899
	46	100	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	0.69	Fixed	91	88 x 47 x 25	1 (B)	Panasonic	929
	47	120	✓	(A)	✓	✓	✓	✓	0.64	Internal	82	101 x 46 x 21	1 (B)	Siemens	449
	53	122	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	0.67	Internal	93	109 x 46 x 22	1 (B)	Siemens	399
	64	132	✓	✓	✓			✓	0.88	Internal	93	102 x 44 x 20	1	Sony Ericsson	865
	55	115	✓	(A)			✓	✓	0.67	Internal	90	110 x 47 x 23	1 (B)	Siemens	289
	45	103	✓	(A)					0.74	Internal	80	102 x 44 x 20	1	Sony Ericsson	315
	86	215	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	0.65	Internal	108	110 x 46 x 22	1	Sagem	399
	46	102					✓		0.56	Internal	83	103 x 46 x 22	1 (B)	Siemens	199
	45	121	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		0.74	Internal	89	99 x 48 x 22	1 (B)	Siemens	819
	43	165	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	0.52	Internal	118	109 x 56 x 20	1 (B)	Siemens	1099
	64	137	✓	✓	✓	✓			0.88	Internal	94	107 x 45 x 22	1	Motorola	349
	43	113							1.30	Internal	74	100 x 44 x 18	1	Sony Ericsson	249
	38	155						✓	0.94	Internal	99	97 x 52 x 25	1	Sony Ericsson	435
	52	177					✓		0.43	Internal	78	98 x 42 x 22	1	Alcatel	129
	23	120					✓	✓	0.91	Fixed	69	80 x 43 x 19	1 (B)	Panasonic	319



Do *MOBILES* kill mice?

Our New Zealand sister magazine *Consumer* analysed the current state of research into potential health effects of mobile phones. Here's a summary of its findings.

IN A NUTSHELL

■ After many years of studies, there seems to be no consistent, conclusive evidence that reasonable use of a mobile phone can harm your health.

The potential health effects of mobile phones have been extensively studied, yet no convincing evidence for harm has been discovered. The American Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has this to say about the subject: "The available scientific evidence does not show that any health problems are associated with using wireless phones. There is no proof, however, that wireless phones are absolutely safe."

But neither is crossing the road, or eating fish. We can't live without risk.

WHAT'S THE CONCERN?

There've been many scientific studies into the effect of radio waves on living tissue. So far, the only accepted effect is heating.

Mobile phones transmit radio waves with a maximum of 0.25 watts of energy. If reception is good, it's even lower. They also transmit in bursts, not continuously. Some of the waves are absorbed into your head and generate a minimal amount of heat.

Compare this with the 25 W of heat continuously generated by your brain, and you see the significance, or lack of it. Going for a brisk walk will warm up your head far more than talking on a mobile.

As for the type of radiation, radio waves at mobile phone frequencies don't have sufficient energy to damage cells.

Other sources of radiation are known to be dangerous, yet we willingly expose ourselves to them

every time we lie in the sun, have an x-ray, or take an airline flight. Solar radiation has enough energy to strip electrons from atoms, so is capable of damaging DNA. That's one reason why limiting our exposure to the sun will reduce the risk of cancers.

WHAT DO STUDIES SHOW?

Although some studies of mobile phones have pointed to various health issues, none has produced a repeatable, identifiable risk.

A study in Adelaide exposed mice, specially bred to be cancer-prone, to radiation at mobile phone frequencies for one hour a day over 18 months. Of the exposed mice, 43% developed cancer, compared to 22% of the unexposed mice.

A second experiment was set up to see if the results could be repeated, but this time they used more mice and had stricter control over how they were exposed. The result: no increase in the likelihood of cancer.

Among recent examples of other studies:

■ In September 2002 the Swedish Radiation Protection Authority found "no consistent evidence" of increased risk of cancer from using a mobile phone for up to five years.

■ On the other hand, a 2003 Swedish study of 1429 people with brain tumours and 1470 controls concluded that analogue mobile phones increase the risk of tumours. No effect was found for digital mobiles.

■ The World Health Organization (WHO) is unlikely to start any new research when its current review of mobile phone safety ends in three or four years. Its comment: "After a certain amount of time, you have to say enough is enough."

IN SUMMARY

No studies into mobile phone safety have produced any repeatable identifiable risk. Mobiles have been the subject of close scrutiny for so long, we think if the risk were anything other than absolutely minimal, consistent results would have emerged by now.

In other words, don't worry about reasonable use of your mobile phone — there are plenty more significant risks in life.



Sweet secrets

RIBENA Blackcurrent Fruit Drink might seem the obvious choice if you had to pick the healthiest option for kids from the selection of fruit drinks on the right. After all, we're told the blackcurrants in **RIBENA** "contain four times the Vitamin C of oranges", and surely it's better than something the flavour of bubblegum?

In fact this **RIBENA** drink isn't any healthier than the others: it contains only 5% fruit — the same as the two **FRUITY FLAVORITS** pictured.

RIBENA also has more sugar per 100 mL than the other drinks: 12.5 g compared with 10.9 g. A 330 mL pouch of **RIBENA** contains 41.3 g of sugar — that's equivalent to over eight teaspoons, and is more than in a 375 mL can of Coca Cola.

A representative of GlaxoSmithKline, the manufacturer of **RIBENA**, told us it's currently evaluating the introduction of a low-sugar/low-calorie version.



PHOTOS: TAMARA GRAMM



SOFT DRINK = SOFT BONES?

Soft drinks have been linked to fat kids, but now, putting another nail in the soft-drink coffin, a recent study has found that the more soft drink teenage girls drink, the less dense their bones are.

The study's authors think the most likely reason is that soft drinks push out more nutritious and better-for-your-bones drinks like milk from their diets.



FAST-FOOD FUTURE?

Would you ever have expected to hear this from a fast-food giant? **MCDONALD'S** CEO, Guy Russo, told us: "We've made the decision to be part of the solution to the obesity problem by creating healthier choices and improving nutrition information, while at the same time satisfying customers and stakeholders."

And if you've satisfied your fast-food craving at **MCDONALD'S** recently, you may already have noticed some changes. Since May 17, nutrition information has been given on the packaging for **MCDONALD'S** Big Macs, Quarter Pounders, Cheeseburgers, Junior Burgers, McOzs and Sausage and Egg McMuffins. And during April and May, burger buns with 50% less sugar than before were also introduced.

The next phase for nutrition labelling, due to happen from August, will cover **MCDONALD'S** chicken and fish products and fries, among other foods. Crucially, all restaurants will be replacing the beef tallow (fat) currently used for cooking with a liquid canola oil, which is lower in saturated fat. And we can expect an alternative **Happy Meal** — in the research and trial stage at present, but thought to incorporate lean meat as well as fruit and veggies — to be launched later in the year.

We welcome this positive and proactive move from one of the leading players in the fast-food industry. But the whole industry needs to work on healthier fast food if we're to seriously tackle Australia's high obesity levels — improving the nutrition profile of all current big sellers as well as creating new products.

Cook's knives

A good cook's knife is essential in a well-equipped kitchen.

We tested 18 to find the ones that cut well and stay sharp.

Cutting, chopping, slicing, carving, peeling, filleting ... the list of meal preparation tasks that involve a knife could go on and on. For many of these tasks you can buy a specialist knife, but few home cooks would have such a large array of knives, let alone remember what they're all meant for.

If you buy only one good knife for your kitchen, choose one with which you can do most jobs: a so-called cook's knife. It's a favourite with professionals because of its versatility: it's neither too large for chopping herbs or peeling garlic, nor too small for cutting fruit, vegetables and meat.

The blade of a cook's knife is generally around 20 cm long (that's eight inches for those who still think imperially in the kitchen), a good length for cutting jobs. With it you should never need to use force, but let the blade glide through whatever it's cutting.

The blade is wide and tapers to a narrow point, so you can also use it in a rocking motion when chopping herbs or dicing fruit and veg, if you're comfortable with that technique. Just keep the point on the chopping board and move the handle up and down.

THE TEST

To help you find a good knife that'll cut well, stay sharp and is comfortable to hold, we bought two each of 18 knives and put them through their paces.

Our cutting crew used one set for chopping, cutting and slicing vegetables and meat; the other set was sent to a specialist laboratory for assessment of their initial sharpness and resistance to blunting.

All the knives in the test have a fine-edged blade (as opposed to serrated, or scalloped

like a breadknife) and a hard plastic handle (except for the GLOBAL and FÜR, which are all-metal — see *Anatomy of a knife*, right).

WHICH ONES CAN CUT IT?

You can no longer assume that if a knife is forged and heavy, it must be good. The five heaviest knives in the test didn't make it into the *What to buy* list, but three stamped knives did. For more on forged, stamped and other knife construction details, see *Anatomy of a knife*, right.

You can't judge by price, either. While the most expensive knife in the test came second overall, three others costing less than \$70 scored nearly as well.

On the cutting board, most of the knives did pretty well — only three had overall cutting scores lower than 80% — but the laboratory tests revealed differences.

According to the lab technicians, 13 of the 18 knives in the test could have benefited from sharpening before use. Overall, one third showed clearly better resistance to blunting, which means they'll stay sharp a little longer.

These six knives are listed below and profiled on page 40.

IN A NUTSHELL

- On test: 18 cook's knives with blades around 20 cm, ranging in price from \$12 to more than \$200.
- Most of the knives in the test scored very well in the cutting tasks; a third of them were also quite resistant to blunting, so they'll stay sharp longer.

WHAT TO BUY

GLOBAL G-2	\$120.00
WÜSTHOF Classic 4582/20	\$225.00
MUNDIAL 5110-8 ZT	\$89.95
VICTORINOX Fibrox 5.2003.19	\$45.95
MESSERMEISTER Park Plaza 8007-8	\$66.00
RICHARDSON SHEFFIELD	\$29.95

The cheapest of these aren't necessarily always the best value for money — you have to try them out to see which fits your hand best and feels comfortable.



Anatomy of a knife

■ **Forged knives** were long regarded as the best you can buy because they kept their edge longer than other fine-edged knives. The blade and tang (the piece of metal that extends into the handle) are made from a single piece of steel that's heated, moulded, hardened, tempered (heated and cooled to give the desired level of hardness and flexibility) and then ground to a cutting edge. It's a labour-intensive technique, which explains why forged knives are generally more expensive than stamped knives, which are primarily made by machine.

■ **Stamped knives** are machine-stamped out of a piece of steel and then ground, polished and honed. While they're generally cheaper than forged knives, they're no longer necessarily inferior — three of the top six knives in the test are stamped (the **GLOBAL**,

VICTORINOX and **MESSERMEISTER** Park Plaza).

■ A newer type are **one-piece seamless knives**. They're also stamped, but the blade and handle are all-metal, with no other handle material. The metal can either be the same throughout or dissimilar for handle and blade. Two knives in the test (**GLOBAL** and **FÜR!**) are one-piece seamless metal with a hollow metal handle.

■ The **tang** is the metal that extends from the blade into the handle; a full tang runs right through the handle and adds weight and balance.

■ In a forged knife, the **blade** is relatively thick and heavy and has a **bolster** (a thick ridge) at the handle end of the blade for strength and balance. Stamped knives tend to have a lightweight blade of uniform thickness, a half-tang and no metal bolster.

■ The **handle** is usually made of hard plastic that's riveted or glued to the tang, or moulded around it. No knife in the test had a wooden handle, as was the norm in the past. Moulded plastic handles are now popular because they're relatively light, comfortable to grip and have no grooves and rivets where bacteria can get trapped.

BLADE MATERIALS

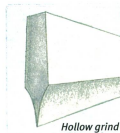
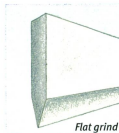
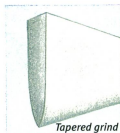
Have you ever wondered why many knives nowadays are more difficult to sharpen than the old, rusty knife that lives at the back of your kitchen drawer? In the past knife blades were made from soft, plain carbon steel that corroded easily but was easy to sharpen.

Knife blades today don't corrode as easily. They're made from food-grade stainless steels, to which alloying elements (such as molybdenum, chromium, vanadium) are added, often in relatively high amounts, to make them corrosion-resistant and hard enough to keep their sharp edge. These substances, however, also make the blade more difficult to sharpen.

A compromise between durable but hard-to-sharpen stainless and carbon steel that's easy to sharpen but rusts is a high-carbon stainless steel — it combines sharpness with durability.

THE CUTTING EDGE

The cutting edge of the blade can be ground (sharpened) three different ways. **Tapered** means it's sharpened on both sides to a tapering (or V) edge, which gives a strong, firm blade with plenty of metal to sharpen. **Flat grinding** the edge is much cheaper because the blade is only sharpened at the point and has the same thickness from the back to the cutting edge. With a **hollow grind**, the bottom part of the blade is hollowed out, making the cutting edge quite thin and sharp, but also weak and vulnerable to breakage and almost impossible to sharpen when blunt.



PHOTOS: TAMARA GRAHAM

PAAMELA HORSFELL

TEST: 20 cm cook's knives

Brand / model (in rank order)	PERFORMANCE			SPECIFICATIONS					
	1 Overall score (%)	2 Cutting score (%)	3 Technical score (%)	4 Forged	5 Dishwasher-safe	Weight (g)	Origin	Warranty (years)	Manufacturer / distributor
GLOBAL G-2	86	92	72			174	Japan	10	Sheldon & Hammond
WÜSTHOF Classic 4582/20	81	88	66	✓	✓	243	Germany	'Lifetime' (C)	Milner's
MUNDIAL 5110-8 ZT	80	84	72	✓		231	Brazil	10	Sheldon & Hammond
VICTORINOX Fibrox 5.2003.19	80	80	80		✓	113	Switzerland	'Lifetime' (C)	Oppenheimer
MESSERMEISTER Park Plaza 8007-8	79	86	63		✓	205	Germany	'Lifetime' (C)	Damco
RICHARDSON SHEFFIELD (A)	79	82	73	✓	✓	202	China	ns	McPhersons Houseware
MESSERMEISTER San Moritz Elite E2686-8	77	86	57	✓	✓	266	Germany	'Lifetime' (C)	Damco
ICEL (A)	75	82	58	✓	ns	251	Portugal	'Lifetime' (C)	Phillip Lazarus
ZWILLING J A HENCKELS 31071-200 8"	75	85	50	✓	✓	223	Germany	'Lifetime' (C)	United Housewares
F DICK Premier 81447-21 (B)	74	83	52	✓	ns	267	Germany	'Lifetime' (C)	E P Wagner & Son
ICEL 271.8610.20	74	81	58		✓	211	Portugal	'Lifetime' (C)	Phillip Lazarus
F DICK Superior 4447-21	73	84	48	✓	ns	224	Germany	1	E P Wagner & Son
FELIX SOLINGEN 9512/21 cm	73	83	51	✓	✓	242	Germany	10	Sheldon & Hammond
FELIX SOLINGEN 9012/21 cm	71	83	42	✓	✓	264	Germany	10	Sheldon & Hammond
FÜRI Pro	68	80	40			197	China	25	Fürtechnics
AVANTI Chef 8" — 20 cm	64	69	53		✓	112	Taiwan	10	Sheldon & Hammond
WILTSHIRE Forged Professional	61	65	52	✓	✓	273	China	25	McPhersons Houseware
WILTSHIRE Fine Edge Professional	59	71	32		✓	175	China	10	McPhersons Houseware

* Prices are recommended retail, as supplied by manufacturers in February 2004.

ns Not stated.

(A) This knife has no name or model number on it. If you can't find it, ask for the Richardson Sheffield 20 cm cook's knife or the forged icel.

(B) The manufacturer tells us this knife has been discontinued but you may still find it in shops.

(C) A 'lifetime' warranty just means the product is guaranteed to last as long as it lasts. A specified time period is preferable.

Profiles

Profiles are of the knives in the What to buy list, in rank order. Prices are recommended retail, as supplied by manufacturers in February 2004.

GLOBAL G-2

Price: \$120

A lightweight one-piece stainless-steel stamped knife with a flat grind (see *The cutting edge*, page 39) and dimpled handle.

GOOD POINTS

- Exceeded at all cutting tasks.
- Well balanced.
- Good resistance to blunting.

BAD POINTS

- Male assessors found the handle a little small.



WÜSTHOF CLASSIC 4582/20

Price: \$225

A fairly heavy forged knife with a full tang and a tapered grind.

GOOD POINTS

- Very comfortable.
- Smooth grip.
- Well balanced.
- Good resistance to blunting.

BAD POINTS

- Male assessors found the handle thin.



MUNDIAL 5110-8 ZT

Price: \$89.95

A fairly heavy forged knife with a full tang and a flat grind.

GOOD POINTS

- Comfortable.
- Smooth grip.
- Well balanced.
- Good resistance to blunting.

BAD POINTS

- People with larger hands may find the handle a little small.



VICTORINOX FIBROX 5.2003.19

Price: \$45.95

A very lightweight stamped knife with a flat grind, rough, non-slip grip and a half-tang.

GOOD POINTS

- Fairly comfortable.
- Good-sized handle.
- Good grip.
- Fairly well balanced.
- Very good resistance to blunting — even after the tests it was still sharp enough for kitchen use.

BAD POINTS

- None noted.



1 Overall score

Cutting performance contributes 70% to the overall score and the technical tests 30%.

There's no ease of use score as the comfort, grip and balance of a knife largely depend on personal preferences. Our assessors' comments on these aspects are mentioned in the profiles below (assessors included men and women with large as well as small hands, left- and right-hand users).

2 Cutting score

We rated each knife for:

- Rapid chopping (parsley).
- Finely slicing tomatoes.
- Slicing carrots.
- Thinly slicing cucumbers (requiring accuracy).
- Cutting steak.

Each task was weighted equally.

3 Technical score

We assessed the knives' sharpness initially (as bought) and after 100 burnishing strokes on a rod that blunts the edge to measure their resistance to blunting (or sharpness durability).

4 Forged

A tick indicates the knife is forged; all the others are stamped. See *Anatomy of a knife*, page 39, for more on this. Forged knives used to be heavier and more expensive, but these days aren't necessarily better (as the test results show).

5 Dishwasher-safe

While some of the knives are labelled 'dishwasher-safe', many manufacturers recommend only handwashing a good knife. See *Keeping it sharp*, page 42, for more on this.

What to look for

■ When you're buying a knife, handle it in the shop to see how it fits your hand. Some are quite heavy, others are lighter, have a short or long handle, smooth or rough grip. Make sure you can use it comfortably. Grip the knife normally: there should be no ridges or other protrusions that aren't in the right place for your hand.

■ If you have small hands you may be better off with a knife with a relatively short handle. Of the knives in the test, the **MUNDIAL**, **RICHARDSON SHEFFIELD**, **FELIX SOLINGEN 9512** and **AVANTI** have shorter handles (but with the **AVANTI** the cutting crew found their index finger got too close to the blade edge).

■ The **ICEL 271.8610.20** with a longer handle would suit people with larger hands — unfortunately it showed only modest resistance to blunting.

■ Handle and blade should be well balanced. The knife should feel like an extension of your hand: neither blade-heavy nor handle-heavy, both of which will tire your wrist. See the profiles and *What about the rest* (below) for how the knives in our test fared for balance.

■ Hold the knife with the back at eye level and the point away from you to check the blade is straight.

■ Inspect the knife for flaws or nicks in the blade or gaps in the handle around the rivets, which could collect bacteria. Seamless one-piece metal knives with a smooth handle are particularly easy to keep clean.

MESSERMEISTER PARK PLAZA 8007-8

Price: \$66

A stamped knife of good weight, with a full tang and a tapered grind.

GOOD POINTS

- Comfortable.
- Smooth grip.
- Fairly well balanced.

BAD POINTS

■ According to the lab technicians, this knife would benefit from some additional sharpening before use — as would all the knives that didn't make it into the *What to buy* list.



RICHARDSON SHEFFIELD

Price: \$29.95

A forged knife of good weight with a full tang and a tapered grind.

GOOD POINTS

- Fairly comfortable.
- Smooth grip.
- Good resistance to blunting.

BAD POINTS

■ A bit blade-heavy.
■ People with larger hands may find the handle too short.



WHAT ABOUT THE REST?

The rest of the knives scored lower overall, mainly because of poorer performance in the technical tests, which assessed their resistance to blunting. According to the technical staff, these knives would all benefit from some additional sharpening before use. Specific problems or good points are listed below.

■ **Well balanced:** Both **F DICK** knives, **FELIX SOLINGEN 9012**.

■ **Blade-heavy** (with additional comments in brackets): **AVANTI** (poorly balanced, short handle); **FELIX SOLINGEN 9512** (short handle); **FÜRI Pro** (thinner handle with smooth grip, comfortable); **ICEL** (handle is a good size and shape); **MESSERMEISTER San Moritz** (slightly blade-heavy, though with a comfortable and smooth grip); both **WILTSHIRE** knives; **ZWILLING J A HENCKELS** (comfortable, smooth handle).

■ **Handle-heavy:** **ICEL 271.8610.20**.

■ **Uncomfortable handle** (at least for some assessors): **F DICK Premier**, **FELIX SOLINGEN 9012**, **ICEL 271.8610.20**, both **WILTSHIRE** knives.



FOR PEOPLE WITH A DISABILITY

If you have arthritis or weak hands or wrists, you can choose from a large number of special knives designed to make cutting easier for people with limited use of their hand(s). Pictured from top to bottom are:

- A **STIREX** knife with an upright handle, creating a good working position for forearm and wrist.
- A **REFLEX** knife with a lightweight, closed-grip handle that's set at an angle to minimise wrist movement.
- An ergonomic knife with an adjustable 'quad grip' handle that's curved and angled at the top so it wraps back over the top of the user's hand.
- A **MANOY** rocker knife that allows cutting with one hand only.

For more information on specially designed knives and other cutting options, visit the Independent Living Centre in your state (only the NT doesn't have one).

Keeping it sharp

A fine-edged knife, such as the cook's knives we tested, should be very sharp when you buy it, but with every cut you make the finely ground edge becomes a little less sharp, until it's eventually completely blunt.

To keep it sharp, you need to realign (or hone) the blade frequently with a **sharpening steel**; some even suggest honing it every time you use it.

Hold the steel (it should be longer than the knife you want to sharpen) with the tip down on a non-slip surface, or at arm's length in front of you. With the other hand move the knife's blade, pointing upward, from bolster to

point around six to eight times, at an angle of around 20° with slight pressure across the steel, or until the edge feels smooth on both sides. Never strike each side more than once in succession, always alternately.

When the edge is damaged and no longer hones well with a steel, the blade needs to be reground. Knife manufacturers recommend various tools for sharpening, most commonly a sharpening stone. To use one, follow the instructions carefully (they'll vary according to the type of stone). Alternatively, get a professional to do the job, if you don't want to risk ruining an expensive knife.

... AND IN GOOD CONDITION

■ After cutting citrus fruit, tomatoes or salty foods, wash the knife straightaway to remove corrosive food particles that can affect the blade.

■ Wash the knife by hand rather than in the dishwasher. Highly alkaline dishwasher detergents can corrode steel, degrade a sharp edge and damage the handle material.

Even a knife labelled 'dishwasher-safe' can get damaged — when the blade hits other objects in the cutlery drawer or basket, or when the knife is left sitting in the dishwasher unwashed with residues of acidic or salty food that can cause corrosion.

■ Cut your food on soft wood or plastic boards only. Cutting on hard surfaces such as glass, metal and benchtop coatings will blunt the knife.

■ Don't store a good-quality knife loose in a drawer where it can get knocked and the blade chipped. A wooden knife block will store your knives safely, or use a magnet bar for all but very heavy knives. Alternatively, a knife rack fitted into a high cupboard is a good place for your knives if you have young children.



Not quite the BIG CHILL?

When it comes to fridges, size really does matter.

Some of us may dream of a custom-designed kitchen with ample space for a trendy, ice-making, all-singing-all-dancing side-by-side fridge. But the reality is that when investing in whitegoods, many of us are working with an existing layout, and have to find a fridge that fits — sometimes into a very tight space. And for small households, a compact fridge may seem a better option than paying more to buy and run a bigger model that makes your groceries look lonely anyway.

While size may be the deciding factor in your purchase decision, you'll also want to know if your fridge can maintain appropriate temperatures throughout the different seasons, chill food quickly, keep temperature fluctuations to a minimum, keep your vegies fresh in the crisper and if it's as energy-efficient as the manufacturer claims. CHOICE tests determine these things, and more.

GOOD THINGS IN SMALL PACKAGES?

We tested nine fridges in the 200–299 L size range and discovered that they're not simply downsized versions of bigger, better fridges: usually when you pay less, you get less, so it's important to consider your options.

If you've got space for the next size up (300 L and above), it might be worth spending the extra money to get better performance. You could even consider buying a bigger fridge secondhand. But if you're restricted by space, your options for a quality fridge are unfortunately limited.

In this new round of tests, the **WESTINGHOUSE RJ282V** achieved the highest score overall, in

particular having the top temperature performance score, and was the best of a pretty ordinary bunch. The next two equal place-getters were the **SAMSUNG Cool Tech SR-21NME** — the cheapest model on test — and the **SAMSUNG Cool Tech SR-24NME**. While neither is a particularly good fridge generally, they're smaller and cheaper than the **WESTINGHOUSE**, so could suit some people's space and budget restrictions.

In case you have a free choice of size and budget, also in this article we give you the verdict on the 26 models, ranging in size from 300 L to more than 525 L (and including some side-by-side fridge/freezers), which are still on the market from earlier tests. Our table also includes the **WESTINGHOUSE Virtuoso RS645V** side-by-side fridge and the 302 L **WESTINGHOUSE RJ302V** — both new models that we tested at the same time as the smaller fridges (see the table, page 46, for details).

IN A NUTSHELL

■ **The 200–299 L fridges** we tested this time are comparatively energy-inefficient, and their temperature performance isn't that good.

■ **It may be worth** considering a better fridge from the slightly larger 300–375 L category instead, as long as it fits your kitchen and budget.

■ **Only one fridge stood out** in the 200–299 L category — the **WESTINGHOUSE RJ282V** — and even this scored well below the best in larger model categories.

Putting energy to good use

MEPS stands for Minimum Energy Performance Standard. All fridges sold in Australia are guaranteed to meet the minimum energy efficiency criteria defined by the standard. So a MEPS gives a kind of baseline energy use from which all models have to start, while the energy label (star rating) tells you which go further than that, by having more stars.

MEPS for fridges were recently reviewed and all products manufactured or imported after January 1, 2005, must comply with the revised higher MEPS. The improvement in energy efficiency is so substantial that from that date (until the star rating is revised as well) you'll mostly be seeing energy labels with four stars or more. But there could be large stocks of older fridges with lower star ratings that'll be on sale for some time.

THE PROBLEMS WITH SMALLER FRIDGES

These small fridges were comparatively poor overall, but they did vary in several areas, so if you have to buy one you'll need to decide what's important to you.

■ The **crisper performance** in both the 284 L WESTINGHOUSE RJ282V and 302 L RJ302V models was good, but was pretty bad in all other models tested this time. If it's important to you that unwrapped vegies stay fresh and don't dry up quickly, look at this rating before buying, or store your vegies in plastic bags.

■ The **cooling score** for almost all the newly tested fridges wasn't good. But if your household is small and you're not likely to be regularly bulk shopping, or you don't have kids continually opening the fridge door and letting warm air in, you might decide that cooling down quickly isn't a priority for this size of fridge.

■ Ultimately, though, the day-to-day job of a fridge is to keep your food cold, so **temperature performance** is key. This is reflected by its heavy weighting in the overall score (see note 1, far right). In general it was comparatively poor temperature performance that let these smaller fridges down.

Temperature fluctuations in particular are a problem, with most of the tested fridges scoring poorly in this area. You have no control over this, and it can affect how well some fresh food, particularly sensitive foods like strawberries, will keep. Ice cream can also partially melt then refreeze, leaving gritty crystals, as a result of temperature fluctuations.

External temperature change also affected the temperature in most of these fridges, with only the SAMSUNG Cool Tech SR-21NME and the MITSUBISHI Electric MR255J rating well for this. In some cases, fresh food would freeze or the freezer might become much too warm with ambient change in winter, unless you reset the controls. (Although it's inconvenient, resetting the controls when the seasons change can help prevent food spoilage. Using a fridge thermometer can help you make the necessary adjustments.) ■

WHAT TO BUY

200–299 L fridges

WESTINGHOUSE RJ282V (T) \$961

300–375 L fridges

KELVINATOR Opal N360H (T) \$1081

FISHER & PAYKEL Active Smart Tasman E331T* (T) \$849

FISHER & PAYKEL Active Smart Tasman E372B* (B) \$1099

376–450 L fridges

FISHER & PAYKEL Active Smart Elegance E411T* (T) \$1299

FISHER & PAYKEL Active Smart Tasman E440T* (T) \$1199

FISHER & PAYKEL Active Smart Elegance E402B* (B) \$1249

FISHER & PAYKEL Active Smart Tasman E442B* (B) \$1299

KELVINATOR Opal N410H (T) \$1285

451–525 L fridges

KELVINATOR N520H (T) \$1682

FISHER & PAYKEL Active Smart Tasman E521T* (T) \$1299

FISHER & PAYKEL Active Smart Tasman E522B* (B) \$1399

Fridges bigger than 525 L

SAMSUNG Cool Tech Plus SRL550DW (B) \$1999

Side-by-side fridges

WHIRLPOOL Gold 6GD22DCXHW \$4809

(T) Top freezer; (B) Bottom freezer.

* These F&P model numbers come in up to four different styles (Tasman, Elegance, Inox and Iridium). They're different only cosmetically and in their prices. Also see Footnote (B), below right.

OUTER SPACE

Even when you're buying a small fridge, it'll need a certain amount of ventilation space at the top, sides and back, so take that into account when you're looking for a fridge to fit a specific space. Check the manufacturer's recommendations in the Instructions when you're buying.

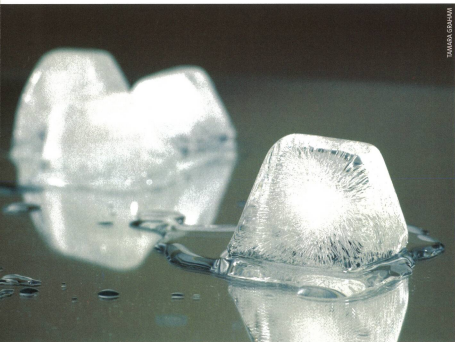
For people with a disability

A representative of the Independent Living Centre (NSW) assessed the fridges in our latest test to see which are better for people with various disabilities.

■ If you have poor vision you need good lighting and controls that are easy to read: the WESTINGHOUSE RJ282V and RJ302V were rated equal best.

■ The SAMSUNG Cool Tech SR-21NME is an OK fridge and the best in this test for wheelchair users. However, it doesn't have the most suitable handle for people with upper limb dysfunction.

■ A simple layout and conventional controls — rather than potentially confusing electronic ones — are preferable for those with cognitive impairment. The WESTINGHOUSE RJ212T and the FISHER & PAYKEL N249T got the highest rating for these features, but as they rated comparatively poorly in our performance tests, we wouldn't recommend them for any other reason.



TIMOTHY GOODMAN

Profiles

For profiles of the 300–375 L and 376–450 L fridges in the *What to buy* list, see CHOICE, November 2002; for profiles of the 451–525 L and over 525 L models in the list, see CHOICE, May 2003; for the profile of the side-by-side **WHIRLPOOL**, see CHOICE, November 2003. Alternatively go to www.choiceextra.com.au and click on the relevant month under 'fridges' in the index. (Also see *Getting extra info*, right.)

WESTINGHOUSE RJ282V

Price: \$961

Top freezer

GOOD POINTS

- Very energy-efficient.
- Controls allow a good range of temperature combinations between the fridge and freezer.
- Very good crisper humidity.
- Easy to clean.
- Versatile storage space.

BAD POINTS

- No chiller compartment.
- The freezer is likely to become much too warm with external temperature change in winter unless you reset the controls.
- Although it has separate controls for each compartment (a good point), changing one can affect the temperature of the other compartment too, and this isn't well explained in the instructions.



Getting extra info

For a general guide to what to look for in a fridge and more information on the features and accessories of the fridges in our table, go to www.choiceextra.com.au and click on any of the articles under 'fridges' in the index. Our article in CHOICE, November 2002, also gives general information on what to look for in a fridge. And see *Profiles*, left, for where to find the models in the *What to buy* list that aren't profiled in this article.

If you're a personal subscriber to CHOICE, don't have the relevant back issue and don't have access to the internet, please phone our Consumer Services people on 1800 069 552 and ask them to send you a copy.

For help choosing a model that'll suit you, go to www.choiceextra.com.au and under 'fridges' click on 'Compare-a-product' and type in your requirements.

NOTES TO THE TABLE (overleaf)

1 Overall score

The overall score is based on performance and ease of use, weighted as follows:

- Ease of use: 20%.
- Temperature performance: 40%.
- Energy efficiency: 20%.
- Crisper freshness: 8%.
- Cooling: 12%.

Notes 2–6

Go to www.choiceextra.com.au and click on any of the articles under 'Fridges' in the index to see what we tested and measured for these scores (under 'Our test').

7 Claimed/measured energy use

The claimed amount of electricity used over one year of normal operation, vs that calculated from our measurements. Most but not all measurements are fairly close to the claims.

8 Noise level

We measured the noise level of each fridge from 1 m distance during normal running; more noise is produced when the compressor starts up and also during the defrost cycle. The design of

your kitchen and the fridge's location also make a difference to what you'll hear, and you may notice that modern frost-free fridges make more unexpected noises (pops and clicks that can be quite loud) than older models did.

9 Door hinge position

R = on the right; L = on the left; rev = reversible.

It's good to have a door that's reversible after purchase, in case you move house and/or need to position the fridge differently. While you can do this yourself with some models, manufacturers often recommend getting a service call (see footnote R).

10 Claimed volumes

The volume claimed by the manufacturer tells you approximately how much air space the fridge has to cool; less space is available for storage, especially in a frost-free freezer compartment. Use the volumes to get an idea of how big the freezer is compared with the fresh-food compartment, so you can choose a fridge that meets your storage needs.

11 10-year running costs

These are calculated at a rate of 12.5 cents per kWh. A 10-year period provides a useful indication of the long-term differences between high and low energy usage — and you should be able to expect your fridge to last at least that long.

† Models from our latest test.

* Measured dimensions include hinges and any protrusions at the back, such as the compressor. They're rounded up to the next centimetre.

** This is the basic warranty; some manufacturers guarantee some parts for longer. Conditions may apply; check with the retailer.

† Recommended retail prices, as provided by manufacturers in March 2004, unless otherwise stated.

ns Not stated.

(A) To be replaced with a new MEPS-compliant model (see page 43) in the second half of this year.

(B) Most Fisher & Paykel fridges come in four price and style ranges: Tasman, Elegance, Inax (brushed stainless steel) and Iridium (stainless steel; fingerprint-resistant). All except the Tasman have

glass shelves. Prices given are average retail prices.

(C) Available in stainless steel, RJ213T, for \$901.

(D) This model has had minor changes since testing, but they shouldn't influence test results.

(E) Available in stainless steel, NJ20SH, for \$2284.

(F) Available in a pewter finish, SRL55DP, for \$2199.

(G) Available with a titanium-coloured front, GR-642AT, for \$1700.

(H) Only available with a stainless steel finish.

(I) Has a similar model, Kelvinator N640G, also for \$3967.

(K) Chiller was too warm in our test.

(L) With temperature control.

(M) A rollout fruit and vegetable bin as a separate compartment, which isn't humid enough for a crisper. Fresh-food compartment 229 L, bin 85 L.

(N) One wide, one narrow.

(O) Removable covered container.

(Q) Yes, but with some difficulty.

(R) Service call recommended to reverse door.

(S) Kiekenalld St George.

PERFORMANCE

Brand / model (in rank order within groups)

200-299 L

Brand / model	1 Overall score (%)	2 Ease of use score (%)	3 Temperature performance score (%)	4 Energy efficiency score (%)	5 Crisper freshness score (%)	6 Cooling score (%)
† WESTINGHOUSE RJ282V	71	70	65	85	86	63
† SAMSUNG Cool Tech SR-21NME	62	60	56	72	58	69
† SAMSUNG Cool Tech SR-24NME	62	60	59	73	58	63
† LG Electrocool GR-2925Q	59	68	63	60	27	54
† WHIRLPOOL Metro 27	59	67	64	68	12	48
† MITSUBISHI ELECTRIC MR255J (A)	58	65	63	59	35	45
† NEC Fresh Air-Flow FR-236	55	62	46	68	35	67
† FISHER & PAYKEL N249T (A) (B)	48	61	45	47	43	43
† WESTINGHOUSE RJ212T (C)	48	67	33	45	52	65

300-375 L

KELVINATOR Opal N360H (A)	78	71	79	78	86	80
FISHER & PAYKEL Active Smart Tasman E331T (A) (B)	74	71	70	76	89	77
FISHER & PAYKEL Active Smart Tasman E372B (A) (B) (D)	73	76	75	62	93	70
† WESTINGHOUSE RJ302V	65	73	49	82	84	64

376-450 L

FISHER & PAYKEL Active Smart Elegance E411T (A) (B)	74	74	71	75	82	77
FISHER & PAYKEL Active Smart Tasman E440T (A) (B)	74	74	70	76	77	80
FISHER & PAYKEL Active Smart Elegance E402B (A) (B) (D)	73	76	74	63	87	77
FISHER & PAYKEL Active Smart Tasman E442B (A) (B)	73	74	75	70	78	71
KELVINATOR Opal N410H (A)	73	69	70	78	86	76
FISHER & PAYKEL Active Smart Inox E415H (A)	64	64	64	61	38	85
LG Express Cool GR-4325F	61	61	72	53	49	45
KELVINATOR Opal NB400H (A)	57	71	60	47	66	33
NEC 3D Cooling FR-405	55	62	45	63	62	59

451-525 L

KELVINATOR N520H (A) (E)	75	70	74	79	86	77
FISHER & PAYKEL Active Smart Tasman ES21T (A) (B)	74	74	71	75	78	82
FISHER & PAYKEL Active Smart Tasman ES22B (A) (B)	72	76	71	65	85	70
SAMSUNG SR57NKA	69	68	73	71	61	60
MAYTAG GT11727PACW	65	60	56	71	88	79
WESTINGHOUSE Mastermind BJ505T (A) (D)	64	77	66	52	77	49
NEC FR-480	60	63	54	67	62	61

MORE THAN 525 L

SAMSUNG Cool Tech Plus SRL550DW (F)	75	72	68	88	74	79
LG Smart Digital GR-S642AQ (G)	69	63	70	75	76	66
MAYTAG Plus GT1928PAGW	66	77	51	72	89	70
GE Profile PTU527X (H)	63	62	66	60	60	61
SIDE-BY-SIDE						
WHIRLPOOL Gold 6GD22DCXHW	76	70	76	81	89	66
LG Premium Ez Digital GR-L207WW	67	66	52	85	76	82
SAMSUNG Cool n' Cool SR5614DW	67	70	47	92	78	77
† WESTINGHOUSE Virtuoso RS645V (J)	61	73	57	63	84	35

		FEATURES			SPECIFICATIONS										COSTS	
Model / ref / use (year)	8 Noise level (dB)	Chiller	Crisper drawers	Dairy	Remove shelves with door at 90° (fresh / freezer)	9 Door hinge position	Freezer location	Measured dimensions (cm, H x W x D)*	10 Claimed total volume (L)	10 Claimed volume, fresh food (L)	10 Claimed volume, freezer (L)	Warranty (years)**	Origin	Manufacturer / distributor	11 10-year running costs (\$)	Price (\$†)
417	41		1	✓	X / ✓	R or L	Top	155 x 61 x 65	284	209	75	2	Australia	Electrolux	521	961
473	36	✓ (K)	1		X / ✓	R	Top	145 x 55 x 60	210	143	67	2	Korea	Samsung	591	599
481	38	✓	1		X / ✓	R	Top	155 x 55 x 60	230	163	67	2	Korea	Samsung	601	649
599	40	✓	1		✓ / ✓	R	Top	161 x 54 x 62	253	179	74	2	Korea	LG	749	899
543	43		1		✓ / X	Rev	Top	169 x 56 x 63	269	205	66	2	India	Whirlpool	679	939
615	38	✓	1		✓ / ✓	ns	Top	158 x 56 x 62	255	179	76	5	Thailand	Mitsubishi Elec.	769	649
522	39	✓	1		✓ / ✓	ns	Top	161 x 55 x 60	236	168	68	2	Korea	NEC	653	749
699	35		1	✓	✓ / ✓	Rev	Top	161 x 53 x 58	248	191	57	2	NZ	Fisher & Paykel	874	699
679	39		1		✓ / X	R or L	Top	139 x 51 x 60	218	168	50	2	Australia	Electrolux	849	660
526	36	✓ (L)	1	✓	X / ✓	R or L	Top	151 x 65 x 74	356	255	101	1	Australia	Electrolux	658	1081
523	35		2	✓	✓ / ✓	R or L, rev (R)	Top	144 x 55 x 70	329	232	97	2	NZ	Fisher & Paykel	654	849
693	35		2	✓	✓ / X	R or L, rev (R)	Bottom	160 x 65 x 70	373	250	123	2	NZ	Fisher & Paykel	866	1099
451	44		1	✓	X / ✓	R or L	Top	163 x 61 x 65	302	228	75	2	Australia	Electrolux	564	997
586	36		1	✓	X / ✓	R or L	Top	170 x 64 x 70	411	314	97	2	NZ	Fisher & Paykel	733	1299
597	34		1	✓	✓ / ✓	R or L, rev (R)	Top	170 x 69 x 71	441	342	99	2	Australia	Fisher & Paykel	746	1199
711	36		2	✓	✓ / X	R or L	Bottom	170 x 64 x 70	403	280	123	2	NZ	Fisher & Paykel	889	1249
672	34		2	✓	✓ / X	R or L, rev (R)	Bottom	170 x 69 x 71	442	307	135	2	Australia	Fisher & Paykel	840	1299
553	38	✓ (L)	1	✓	X / ✓	R or L	Top	168 x 65 x 71	406	305	101	1	Australia	Electrolux	691	1285
722	36		(M)	✓	✓ / ✓	R or L	Top	170 x 64 x 70	411	314 (M)	97	2	NZ	Fisher & Paykel	903	1599
795	39		1	(P)	X / ✓	R	Top	172 x 68 x 67	392	269	123	2	Korea	LG	994	999
875	43	✓ (L)	2	✓	X / X	R or L	Bottom	168 x 65 x 75	396	265	135	1	Australia	Electrolux	1094	1443
714	43		1	✓	✓ / ✓	R or L, rev	Top	172 x 71 x 68	405	280	125	2	Korea	NEC	893	999
615	36	✓ (L)	2	✓	X / ✓	R or L	Top	168 x 80 x 75	519	389	130	2	Australia	Electrolux	769	1682
650	33		2	✓	✓ / ✓	R or L, rev (R)	Top	170 x 80 x 71	517	400	117	2	Australia	Fisher & Paykel	813	1299
784	33		2	✓	✓ / X	R or L, rev (R)	Bottom	170 x 80 x 71	519	360	159	2	Australia	Fisher & Paykel	980	1399
693	37	✓	1		X / ✓	R	Top	182 x 75 x 73	495	349	146	2	Korea	Samsung	866	1099
702	42		2	✓	✓ / ✓	R or L	Top	169 x 70 x 80	498	346	152	5	USA	Maytag	878	1699
929	40	✓ (L)	2 (N)	✓	X / ✓	R	Bottom	170 x 80 x 72	500	317	186	2	Australia	Electrolux	1161	1803
748	46		1		X / ✓	L	Top	183 x 76 x 72	506	355	151	2	Korea	NEC	935	1199
576	40	✓	1		X / ✓	R	Bottom	180 x 83 x 73	551	361	190	2	Korea	Samsung	720	1999
706	37	✓	2		✓ / ✓	R	Top	180 x 86 x 73	563	387	176	2	Korea	LG	883	1499
722	41	✓ (L)	2	✓	✓ / ✓	R or L, rev (R)	Top	171 x 76 x 75	550	378	167	5	USA	Maytag	903	2199
843	37	✓	1		X / X	R	Top	171 x 76 x 73	527	368	160	2	Taiwan	Kleenmaid (S)	1054	1893
811	41	✓ (L)	1	✓	X / X	na	LH side	170 x 84 x 83	644	419	225	2	USA	Whirlpool	1014	4809
737	37	✓ (L)	1	✓	X / X	na	LH side	175 x 90 x 73	594	369	225	2	Korea	LG	921	2999
658	38	✓	2	✓	X / X	na	LH side	170 x 92 x 72	614	387	227	2	Korea	Samsung	823	2999
1048	44	✓ (L)	1	✓	X / (Q)	na	LH side	172 x 98 x 72	643	407	236	2	Australia	Electrolux	1310	3967

Cheap and cheerful

Fancy design and a high price don't guarantee better heating performance — the two cheapest models in our test came top.



PHOTOS: TAMARA GAVAN

IN A NUTSHELL

A fan-assisted model distributes the heat more evenly in the room.

As explained in CHOICE, April 2004 (page 4), we tested heaters later than usual this year to make sure we could buy the latest models — but this means the magazine couldn't publish the results till now. They've been available free to subscribers on www.choiceextra.com.au since the beginning of May: for the detailed results, click on "Column heaters" in the Index.



We tested 10 oil-filled column heaters with a maximum heating capacity of 2400 W, making them suitable for a large bedroom or small living area — depending on where you live and how well insulated your home is.

SAFETY PROBLEMS

We found a number of problems in our safety tests — see note 4, far right, for test details:

- All the models without a tilt switch (see the table) continued to heat when tipped on their side.
- The DELONGHI ECC2400T and KAMBROOK KIH2400 had a minor failure in one of our electrical safety tests.
- None of the heaters switched off in our towel test, but only the DIMPLEX OFC2411TI and R24TWG sustained some minor damage.
- The OMEGA OH2411 tipped over in the tilt test when we adjusted its castors to the least stable position for this test.

WANT MORE INFO?

For more heating information, check the following articles at www.choiceextra.com.au (all listed under "heaters" in the index):

- Your heating options tells you the pros and cons of different heating fuels, and which heater type is most suitable for which heating task.
- Electric personal and room heaters looks at the different types of electric heater.
- Our interactive electric heater database is available for a limited time too. It contains information on prices, features and specifications for close to 200 models, as provided by manufacturers. You can search it for the best model for your needs.

	PERFORMANCE				5 FEATURES								SPECIFICATIONS
Brand / model (in rank order)	1 Overall score (%)	2 Heating score (%)	3 Ease of use score (%)	4 Safety tests	Fan	Heat settings	Timer	Thermal cutoff	Tilt switch	Frost watch	Humidifier	Enclosed columns	Dimensions (L x D x H, cm)
EWT NOC1145TLGT (A)	73	76	65	Pass	✓	3	✓	✓		✓			61 x 16 x 64
DELONGHI DEL2400T	70	71	66	Pass	3	✓	✓	✓		✓			52 x 16 x 65
DIMPLEX FR24	68	71	60	Pass	1				✓			✓	83 x 9 x 61
DELONGHI ECC2400T	67	68	63	(E)	3	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓	52 x 17 x 64
OMEGA OH2411 (B) (C)	66	62	76	(F)	3			✓				✓	54 x 14 x 66
DIMPLEX OFC2411TI (D)	65	66	64	(G)	(D)	3	✓	✓		✓	✓		61 x 16 x 64
DIMPLEX R24TWG	65	72	47	(G)	2	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	82 x 9 x 61
KAMBROOK KIH2400 (C)	65	62	71	(E)	3	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓		61 x 12 x 66
OMEGA WA2412T24S	65	73	46	Pass	3					✓		✓	59 x 16 x 68
DELONGHI HMV2400T	57	53	67	Pass	3	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	51 x 17 x 64

* Rounded to the nearest 1 cm, 0.1 kg and 0.1 m, respectively.

** Recommended retail, as provided by manufacturers in April 2004.

(A) This model has a fan and additional heating element.

The scores are with the fan switched on. Heating score with the fan switched off: 67%; overall score: 66%. Also available without a fan: NOC1144TLT, \$130.

(B) Also available with a timer: OH2411T24, \$169.

(C) The manufacturer tells us this model will be discontinued.

(D) Also available with a fan (OFC2411TIF, \$180), and in silver (OFC2411TIS, \$160; OFC2411TIF S, \$180). The fan model wasn't available at the time of our tests, but is likely to perform better than the tested non-fan model.

(E) Minor failure in an electrical safety test. Breville told us it

What to buy

EWI NOC1145T LGT

Price: \$140

GOOD POINTS

- Has a fan and additional 800 W heating element.
- The most even heat distribution around the room, with and without the fan.
- Comparatively quick to raise the room temperature by 5°C with and without the fan.
- Comparatively quick to raise room temperature by 10°C with



- the fan switched on.
 - Good value for money.
- ### BAD POINTS
- Didn't manage to raise room temperature by 10°C with the fan switched off.
 - No tilt switch.

DELONGHI DEL2400T

Price: \$129

GOOD POINTS

- Consistently good heating performance.

BAD POINTS

- No tilt switch.



WHAT ABOUT THE REST?

A number of heaters had problems in our safety tests (see *Safety problems*, left, for details). In addition:

- The **DIMPLEX OFC2411TI**, **KAMBROOK** and **OMEGA OH2411** didn't manage to raise the room temperature by 10°C.
- The **DELONGHI ECC2400T** and **HMW2400T** distributed the heat the most unevenly around in the room.
- The **DIMPLEX FR24** was slower than most to raise the room temperature by 5°C, and has only one heat setting.
- The **DIMPLEX R24TWG** and **OMEGA WA2412T24S** aren't as easy to use as the other models.

MODELS STILL AVAILABLE FROM OUR LAST TEST (CHOICE, MAY 2001)

Brand / model (in rank order)	Overall score (%) [*]	Heating score (%) [*]	Ease of use score (%) [*]	Price (\$) ^{**}
DELONGHI Radia RD2400TF (A)	77	79	71	279
DELONGHI Rapido RAP2400T (B)	74	73	78	399
HOTPOINT HPF-12	71	70	72	149
OMEGA 2FU2412T24 (C)	65	70	54	335
MISTRAL MCH11/2400 (D)	63	68	50	120

^{*} The scores aren't comparable to the latest test because the test program has changed.

^{**} Recommended retail, as provided by manufacturers in April 2004.

(A) This model has a fan. The scores are with the fan switched on. Heating score with fan off: 65%; overall score: 67%. It's also available without a fan: RD2400T, \$269.

(B) This model has an additional heating element. The scores are with the element switched on. Heating score in switched-off mode: 75%; overall score: 76%.

(C) This model has a fan. The scores are with the fan switched on. Heating score with fan off: 66%; overall score: 63%.

(D) Also available with a timer: MCH11/2400T, \$150.

1 Overall score

This is a combination of the heating (70%) and ease of use (30%) scores.

2 Heating score

The heaters were assessed in a thermal comfort lab — a room measuring 4.9 m by 3.5 m with an insulated ceiling (height 2.4 m), which sits inside a temperature-controlled outer room that provides a constant outside temperature. We tested the following:

- Heating speed:** How long does the heater take to raise the room temperature by 5°C and 10°C from a starting temperature of 8°C?
- Heat distribution:** How evenly does the heater heat the room?
- Thermostat performance:** How well does the heater's thermostat maintain a selected room temperature?

3 Ease of use score

We assessed the following:

- Use of controls.
- Visibility and clarity of markings.
- Ease of cleaning.
- Cord storage.
- Mobility on hard surfaces.

4 Safety tests

See *Safety problems*, far left, for model details.

- Stability or tilt test:** This requires the heater not to tip over while gradually being tilted to an angle of 15°.
- Towel test:** A towel is draped over the heater while it's turned to its highest setting. This simulates what could happen if a towel or clothing were accidentally dropped or left on it. Ideally, a thermal cutout should protect the heater from being damaged and the towel from catching fire.
- Electrical safety tests:** We carried out a number of Australian standard tests.
- Surface temperature test:** We measured whether the heaters comply with Australian

standard requirements for maximum temperatures of different heater parts.

5 Features

- Thermostat:** This maintains a desired average room temperature (as long as it's within the heater's capacity), and should have a control that's easy to read and set. All the tested models have one.
- Fan:** A fan usually allows for much quicker and more even heat distribution. While it can be noisy, you're likely only to use it for a short time until your room is warm, and then switch it off and let the heater's thermostat maintain the desired room temperature.
- Number of heat settings:** The more settings, the more flexibility you have to cope with different heating requirements.
- A timer:** lets you set the heater to turn on before you get home, for example.
- A thermal cutout:** is meant to prevent the heater from overheating. However, they don't necessarily work when the heater tips over.
- A tilt switch:** is intended to turn the heater off if it tips over.
- Frost watch:** This is claimed to maintain a temperature of about 5°C if the thermostat is left on its lowest setting, avoiding frost. We didn't test this feature but it's a good idea for colder climates.
- Humidifier:** Some models evaporate water from a container built into an end panel to prevent the air in your room from drying out too much.
- Enclosed columns:** Some models have partly or fully enclosed columns, others the more traditional exposed column design. The test results show this doesn't seem to make much of a difference to heating performance, so it comes down to which look you prefer.
- Cord length:** Look for a long cord if you want to move the heater around, as they're not supposed to be used with an extension cord — it may get hot and pose a fire hazard.

Weight (kg)	Cord length (m) [*]	Warranty (years)	Origin	Manufacturer / distributor	Price (\$) ^{**}
4	2.6	2	China	Hagemeyer	140
4	2.2	2	Italy	Parex Industries	129
4	2.7	2	UK	Hagemeyer	175
6	2.7	2	Italy	Parex Industries	349
0	1.7	2	China	Omega / Smeg	149
8	1.3	2	China	Hagemeyer	160
5	2.6	2	UK	Hagemeyer	240
2	2.7	2	Turkey	Breville	260
4	2.8	2	Italy	Omega / Smeg	299
2	2.1	2	Italy	Parex Industries	299

tested 20 samples of the Kambrook after receiving our test results, and all of them passed. DeLonghi also told us it's never had this problem.

(F) Tipped over in the tilt test when the castors were in the least stable position.

(G) Minor damage in the towel test.

aboutchoice

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recalls&bans

Nowadays there are so many product recalls we may not be able to print all of them in *CHOICE*. For comprehensive recall information go to the Federal Treasury website: www.recalls.gov.au. If you don't have web access, call the Consumer Safety Unit on (02) 6263 2747.

Companies often rent 1800 numbers for a couple of months after a recall is announced. If the number given is no longer operating, phone the manufacturer or retailer direct.

FOOD: Aqua Marine Marketing has recalled cooked medium tiger prawns, sold in the deli section of Safeway stores between March 26 and April 1, 2004, and packaged into random weights for each customer. This recall applies to Victoria only.

The problem: Contamination by the bacteria *Salmonella infantis* has been detected.

What to do: If you froze this product for later use, don't eat it. Return it to the place of purchase for a refund.

FOOD: Foodland Associated has recalled *Signature Range Classic Caesar Salad Dressing* in a 295 mL glass bottle, all best-before dates up to and including February 28, 2005. This product is imported from New Zealand and sold in Queensland and WA.

The problem: It contains undeclared fish protein.

What to do: If you have a fish protein allergy, don't eat it. Return it to the place of purchase for a refund. Call 1800 880 078 for more information.

FOOD: The Sanitarium Health Food Company has recalled *Sanitarium Casserole Mince*, 415 g can, without a ring-pull top. This item has product code 3342 followed by a varying set of numbers to indicate a time stamp, and then code BBL3 or BBL4, on the base of the can.

The problem: Sanitarium BBQ Soy Sausages, which contain milk and egg ingredients, have been incorrectly labelled as Sanitarium Casserole Mince.

What to do: If you're allergic or intolerant to milk and eggs, don't eat it. Return it to the place of purchase for a refund or product exchange. For more information call 1800 673 392.

FOOD: Middle East Bakeries has recalled *Pita for Kebabs*, 400 g plastic packet, all use-by dates between April 1 and 27, 2004, sold in NSW, NT, Queensland, SA and WA.

The problem: It contains gluten, which isn't declared on the label.

What to do: If you froze this product for later use and have a wheat flour allergy or intolerance, don't eat it. Return it to the place of purchase for a refund.

CHILD'S SWIMMING AID: Playcorp has recalled *Deep Blue Learn to Swim Inflatable Back Bubble*, style number 81381, batch ID ORPC02060403, sold exclusively through Kmart stores throughout Australia from January 2003 to February 2004.

The problem: The fastening clip may come apart during normal use.

What to do: Stop using it, and return it to the place of purchase for a refund. For more information call 1800 887 715.

TOY: Hasbro has recalled *Star Wars Darth Vader Throne Room Duel Action Figure*, identified by its product number 84978 on the bottom of the package next to the barcode and sold through various toy retailers since June 1, 2003.

The problem: The figure has a 'lightsaber throwing action', which may also be able to throw them, improvised items farther than 300 mm in free flight, which contravenes projectile toys regulations.

What to do: Stop using it. Call Hasbro on 1300 138 697 from 9 am to 5 pm EST to arrange for return of the product and a replacement figure of equal value.

TOY: Skansen Giftware has recalled *Aqua the Mermaid Bear Beanie Kid*, product code BK386, available nationally except the NT. It's a 20 cm tall bean-filled toy in blue plush with a pink bow on its chest, a gold plastic star on its head and gold embroidery on its right arm.

The problem: There's a risk associated with the sharpness of the points on the gold star.

What to do: Don't let your child play with it. Return it to the place of purchase for a refund, or call 1800 063 664 for more information.

CHILD'S CLOTHING: Barrymores has recalled *Peter Rabbit Girls two-piece shirt and jeans set*, sizes 00-2, available since February 2004 at department stores and specialty retailers. The style was available in a two-piece set with a pink or rose floral shirt and co-ordinated denim pants. The shirt has a woven Peter Rabbit badge on the bottom of the front panel, and the sleeves are gathered with beaded ties attached.

The problem: Beads on the shirt could detach, presenting a choking hazard.

What to do: Don't put it on your child. Return it freepost to the following address for a full refund: Credit Dept, Barrymore Pty Ltd, Freepost Box 41, North Fremantle 6159. Call 1800 999 212 for further information.

INFANT CLOTHING: Target has recalled *infant rompers – V8 Supercars Australia and Ford Ozemail Racing Team*, sold exclusively through Target and Baby Target from November 23, 2003. The V8 Supercars Australia style has an orange body with black contrast panels and features the V8 Supercars logo on the front. The Ford Ozemail Racing Team style has a green body, white side panels and red trim, and features the Ford and Ozemail Racing Team logo on the front.

The problem: Some studs could detach, presenting an ingestion hazard. **What to do:** Don't put it on your child. Return it to your nearest Target, Target Country or Baby Target for a refund. For more information call 1800 814 788.

SUNGLASSES: Sovia Imports has recalled two styles of *sunglasses*, both with plastic lenses on a semi-rimless metal frame, sold in NSW, Queensland and Victoria. One style is marked SV274CE on the inside left temple tip and has a removable '100% UV Protection' sticker on the lens. The other style is marked Italy Design 0565 on the inside right temple and has diamonds in a heart shape at the bottom of the left lens.

The problem: Neither product complies with the safety standard for sunglasses and fashion spectacles. The SV274CE style may cause blurred vision and/or discomfort, and requires a warning that it's not suitable for driving. The Italy Design 0565 style requires a warning that it's not suitable for people with defective colour vision or colour vision deficiencies, and that it doesn't comply with the field of view requirements of the standard.

What to do: Stop wearing them and return them to Sovia Imports, 2/19-21 Bourke Road, Alexandria 2015, for a full refund. For more information call (02) 9699 6844.

CAMPING GENERATORS

I Austech Industries has recalled *Scorpion camping generator (ET950L, DY100L, and DY100LB)*.

I Pinnacle Distributors has recalled *Powerbase camping generator (PB-800)*, sold through Tradeline stores in NSW, Tasmania and Victoria; and *PB-850*, sold through Autopros stores Australia-wide, sold from November 9, 2003; and *camping 950 generator (GE-800)*, sold through Autoban stores nationally except WA from November 27, 2003.

I Star Products has recalled *Star 950 camping generator*, sold through Bunnings Warehouse in NT, SA and WA from October 20, 2003.

The problem: An incorrect 12 V battery-charging socket fitted to the generator may allow the associated 12 V plug to be connected to a 240 V outlet, posing the risk of electrocution.

What to do: Stop using it immediately and return it to the place of purchase. For more information call Austech Industries on (07) 3875 1165, Pinnacle Distributors on 1300 724 421 or Star Products on (08) 9940 1530.

TOASTER OVEN: Mistrall has recalled *Mistrall toaster ovens, models MTO1000*, batch code 0135 and 0228; *MTO200CH*, batch codes 0135 and 0228; and *MTO300CH*, batch codes 0135, 0153, 0217 and 0231, manufactured during 2001 and 2002.

The problem: These models have been fitted with an unsuitable supply cord. Sections of the cord may become damaged if it comes into contact with the hot metal rear surface of the oven. This could result in the user being exposed to live wires, posing an electrocution risk.

What to do: Stop using it. Call 1800 686 572 Monday to Friday between 9 am and 5 pm EST to arrange return and replacement of affected units.

MOBILE PHONE CHARGER: Sony Ericsson has recalled the *Sony Ericsson mobile phone charger*, serial number BML 162 099/4 R1A, marked "Made in Thailand by Delta". It's an Australian two-pin charger provided with some Sony Ericsson products, and also sold as a separate accessory.

The problem: The plastic casing may open up and expose the electronics of the charger, creating a hazard to the user. It may also cause a disruption to the power supply.

What to do: Stop using it immediately. Call 1300 132 183 or go to any Sony Ericsson Service Centre for a free replacement.

Dairy Farmers™ IDEAL FOR COOKING
125g

TRADITIONAL NATURAL YOGURT

CONVENIENT SINGLE SERVE

Serving it up

This "convenient single serve" container of yoghurt in fact contains a not-so-convenient 1.25 serves ...

But that's probably not quite as ridiculous as the seven 20 gram servings in each container of rice pudding — who stops at one teaspoonful?

Rice pudding **DELICO** 2 x 140g Net

Vanilla 99% Fat Free Gluten Free

Yes, 20 grams really looks like this.

NUTRITIONAL INFORMATION - VANILLA		
PER SERVE	20g	100g
ENERGY	82.2kJ	411kJ
PROTEIN	18.8g	98g
FAT total	0.46g	2.3g
carbohydrate	0.02g	0.1g
total	4.82g	23.1g
sugars	2.44g	12.2g
CALCIUM	12.4mg	62mg
SODIUM	5.2mg	26mg
CHOLESTEROL	NIL	NIL

NUTRITION INFORMATION	
SERVINGS PER PACKAGE	1.25
SERVING SIZE	100g
AVERAGE QUANTITY PER 100g	
ENERGY	334 kJ
FAT	80 Cal
- SATURATED	5.4 g
CARBOHYDRATE	3.3 g
- TOTAL	2.1 g
- SUGARS	6.0 g
SODIUM	6.0 g
CALCIUM	77 mg
	183 mg

INGREDIENTS: SUGAR, RECONSTITUTED APPLE JUICE (25%), RASPBERRY JUICE (0%), FOOD ACID (330), PRESERVATIVE (211, 223), FLAVOUR, COLOUR (123, 122), CONTAINS SULPHUR DIOXIDE.

A BIG RASPBERRY

How appropriate that this so-called raspberry cordial features a map of the Apple Isle! (And a '0%' claim is new even to us...)

20% EXTRA FREE
2.4L for the price of 2L

ISLAND QUENCH

RASPBERRY

25% FRUIT CORDIAL
2.4 LITRE

WILD HORSE SERIES

MADE IN CHINA
NORRIS
The model is made according to the scale of the real thing so that it is lifelike and breathing.

Breathtaking claims

A couple of increasingly worried subscribers are still waiting for their toy horses to start breathing...

ON SALE MARCH/APRIL

Kmart
Cutting the cost of living.

Senior girl's Yachette satin PJ Available in sizes 7-14. **\$19.99**

Senior boy's knit PJ Available in sizes 7-14. **\$15.99**

Price after offer ends \$12.99 for boy's PJ and \$23.99 for girl's satin PJ.

Who's the April Fool?

Could be Kmart — in its enthusiasm to bring on pranksters' favourite day of the year, they forgot about March 31.

And *Hard Word* readers are certainly no fools — they're waiting till after the alleged sale to buy these boys' pyjamas.

HOW ABOUT A LITTLE HELP?

The book prize for this month's best entry goes to J McGuire. *The Hard Word* would like to thank all the readers who've responded with examples of outrageous ads, promotions and products. Thanks to R&M Fluke, V Barnett, M Rutland, S Clark, R Clarkson, P Collard, S Gleeson, M Nodge, M Coultas and J McGuire for their contributions to this month's *Hard Word*. Please keep them coming.

If you have any examples you think deserve to be on this page, send them to *The Hard Word*, CHOICE, 57 Carrington Road, Marrickville 2204, or email your suggestions to thehardword@choice.com.au.